Sidney H. Griffith

The Beginnings of Christian Theology in Arabic

Muslim-Christian Encounters in the Early Islamic Period

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PREFACE

It was in the course of the first Abbasid century in the world of Islam, roughly 750–850 AD, that Christians living under Muslim rule began to compose theological works in Syriac and Arabic to counter the religious challenges of Islam. These texts were intended for a Christian audience, many of whom had by this time adopted the Arabic language not only for day-to-day purposes in the new cultural milieu, but even as an ecclesiastical language. By the end of the century, major writers in Arabic had appeared in the principal denominations whose patristic and liturgical heritage had been Greek and Syriac. Among the 'Melkites', Theodore Abu Qurrah (c. 755–c. 830) wrote a series of works in Arabic, intended to defend the credibility of the doctrines of the Trinity and the Incarnation, and the claim that Christianity alone is the true religion. Habib ibn Khidmah Abu Ra'itah (d. c. 855) defended the doctrinal formulae of his own 'Syrian Orthodox' or 'Jacobite' church and argued in behalf of the veracity of the Christian religion. 'Ammar al-Basri (d. c. 845), a member of the 'Church of the East', the so-called 'Nestorian' community, wrote Arabic treatises in defense of Christianity that are scarcely distinguishable in method from the treatises of the contemporary Muslim, religious controversialists. It took another century before the Coptic community produced a major Christian writer in Arabic; he appeared in the person of Severus ibn al-Muqaffa' (c. 905–after 987), who composed basic expositions of the Christian faith in Arabic that are still in circulation in the Coptic Orthodox church of today. Subsequently the Copts would produce a body of Christian literature in Arabic that would far outstrip in volume the productions of all the other Christian communities in the Islamic world put together.

These writers might rightfully claim the title of the fathers of the Arab Christian churches. Their works basically set the framework for the Christian/Muslim discussions of later generations. They wrote both studious theological treatises and more popular, apologetical and polemical tracts. A notable feature of their work is their adoption of the methods, and even the technical terminology of the Islamic *'ilm al-kalam*, in an effort to translate Christian theological concepts into the religious idiom of the Arabic language. They can truthfully be called Christian *mutakallimun*, a measure

of the success of their full inculturation into the burgeoning, classical culture of the Islamic world in the era of its first formation, a drama in which Jewish and Christian intellectuals played major roles.

The articles gathered in the present volume study works by these earliest Christian writers in the world of Islam, and the religious network that sustained them. The collection begins in article I by calling attention to the comparative dimension of much of their work, making them likely candidates to be the first comparative religionists, albeit for apologetical purposes. They developed a novel set of criteria for the comparison of religions. Article II introduces the reader to the first 'Syrian Orthodox' writer, regularly to write in Arabic, Habib ibn Khidmah Abu Ra'itah, while article III performs the same service for the first Arabophone theologian of the 'Church of the East', 'Ammar al-Basri. In the 'Syrian Orthodox' community the theological heritage was inevitably in Syriac, and Nonnus of Nisibis, whose work is discussed in article IV, carried the tradition into Islamic times. Article V provides a survey of the major works in Syriac concerned with the challenges of Islam that were produced in the early Islamic period. In article VI there is a discussion of Theodore Abu Qurrah's response to a particular complaint lodged by Muslim polemicists of the early period, namely the charge that the principal doctrines of the Christians come not from scripture, but were formulated at general meetings called by the Roman emperors. Popular apologetics is represented in article VII, in a study of the remarkable legend of the monk Bahira that has circulated in both Syriac and Arabic from the ninth century until almost the present day. Article VIII studies a small treatise by Severus ibn al-Muqaffa' that is arguably a topical outline for all his apologetical work in Arabic. By the tenth century Christian intellectuals in the Islamic world were prepared to make apologetical use of the Aristotelian corpus that Christian and Muslim translators in Baghdad had been busily producing since the early ninth century. Article IX calls attention to the use three Christian writers made of a small work by the Muslim, Aristotelian philosopher, al-Kindi (c. 800–c. 867). We find the beginnings of Christian Arabic literature in eighth century Palestine; article X studies the transition from Aramaic to Arabic in the monasteries of the Judean desert. Finally, in article XI there is an edition of the Arabic text, and an English translation, of a rare, Islamic, anti-Christian tract that features many of the charges otherwise found mentioned only in a number of the Christian texts studied in this volume.

The author would like to take this opportunity to thank the original publishers of these articles for their permission to reproduce them in this volume: Villanova University (I); Otto Harrassowitz, Wiesbaden (II & VII); the editors of *Le Museon* and Peeters Publishers in Leuven (III, VI, & XI);

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SIDNEY H. GRIFFITH

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PUBLISHER'S NOTE

The articles in this volume, as in all others in the Collected Studies Series, have not been given a new, continuous pagination. In order to avoid confusion, and to facilitate their use where these same studies have been referred to elsewhere, the original pagination has been maintained wherever possible.

Each article has been given a Roman numeral in order of appearance, as listed in the Contents. This number is repeated on each page and quoted in the index entries.

COMPARATIVE RELIGION IN THE APOLOGETICS OF THE FIRST CHRISTIAN ARABIC THEOLOGIANS

I. *The First Abbasid Century*

Christian theology first appeared in Arabic writing, after the success of the Abbasid revolution in 750. The geographical area where the Christian writers of this period composed their works is the traditional homeland of the Syriac speaking peoples, in what is today Syria, Turkey, and Iraq. To mention the names of cities such as Edessa, Ḥarran, Nisibis, Tagrit, and Gundešapor should evoke in our minds an image of the intellectual milieu in which they thought and believed.

It is not an accident that the first Abbasid century is the era in which the first Christian treatises in Arabic appeared. A major achievement of the revolution was the assimilation of all the members of the Muslim community, at least in theory. The Abbasid policy, with roots stretching back into the programs of the Umayyad caliph ᶜUmar II (717-720), was to summon the subject populations to Islam, and to promise full political participation to converted Christians, Jews, and Magians. The result of the policy was the rapid spread of Islam among the non-Arab subjects in the empire.[1] This circumstance of government policy gave Christian apologists every reason for quick activity. They produced apologies for the Christian faith, in response to the counter claims of Islam, not only in Syriac, the traditional language of Christians in the area, but in Arabic as well, the new *lingua franca.*

There are three particularly interesting apologetic treatises in Syriac that have survived. As we shall see, an aspect of their importance is the fact that they enable us to learn that the Christian, anti-Muslim apologies of this period, including those written in Arabic, have their roots in the well-developed Syriac intellectual tradition. The most well known of these Syriac treatises is the letter of the Nestorian patriarch Timothy I (780-823), in which he reports his answers to questions about Christianity put to him by the caliph al-Mahdī. While the letter was originally composed in Syriac, in which language a longer and a shorter rendition are now known, it is more familiar to modern scholars in its Arabic versions.[2] Next among Syriac apologies is the treatise of the Jacobite deacon, Nonnus of Nisibis. It is a systematic discussion of the doctrines of the Trinity and the Incarnation, and several Christian religious practices, in the light of objections customarily voiced by Muslims.[3] Finally, we may cite the anti-Muslim, apologetic dialogue which appears as chapter ten in Theodore bar Kônî's *Scholion.* Theodore here defends Christian doctrine and practice against Islamic objections. He argues that only Christianity correctly interprets the Law, the Prophets, and the Gospel, which both communities accept.[4] These Syriac apologies are clearly addressed to the members of the Christian community. Their purpose is twofold. They are intended to provide Christians with answers to Muslim religious challenges. And they are meant to strengthen the Christians' own sense of their religion's credibility, in spite of the Muslims' claim to the contrary.

For all practical purposes, the most significant Christian apologists who wrote in Arabic during the first Abbasid century are also three in number. As it happens, they represent the three main Christian groups in the Near East. Theodore Abū Qurrah was a Melkite.[5] Ḥabīb ibn Ḫidmah Abū Rā'iṭah was a Jacobite.[6] ᶜAmmār al-Baṣrī was a Nestorian.[7] Their treatises readily fall into the two main categories described by Georg Graf as characteristic of Christian Arabic literature.[8] They all wrote fairly detailed discussions of individual Christian doctrines or practices. And each of them wrote a more popular apology for Christianity, which covers the main topics that regularly cropped up in the day to day arguments about religion.

The audience to whom the Arabic writing apologists addressed their treatises was broader than merely the membership of the Christian community. The Christians remained the primary beneficiaries of their apologies. Abū Qurrah, for example, explains in one of his Arabic treatises that a purpose of his discourse *(al-kalām)* is to help prevent members of the Christian community from falling away from their faith.[9] But the Arabic apologies were also intended for Muslim readers. We have evidence from Muslim sources which shows that at least two of the three apologists we have named were in dialogue with Muslim *mutakallimūn*. The *Fihrist* of Ibn an-Nadīm (d. 995), a biobibliography of early Muslim intellectual history, contains reports mentioning Abū Qurrah and ᶜAmmār al-Baṣrī in this connection. Abū Qurrah is named as the adversary against whom the Muᶜtazilite theologian, ᶜĪsā ibn Ṣabīḥ al-Murdār (d. 840), wrote a refutation.[10] While ᶜAmmār appears in the *Fihrist* as the person to whom Abū al-Hudhayl al-ᶜAllāf addressed a refutation of the Christians.[11] Unfortunately none of the anti-Christian works of these two Muslim *mutakallimūn* are available to modern scholars.

As we mentioned above, Abū Qurrah, Abū Rā'iṭah, and ᶜAmmār each wrote a general apology for Christianity, fairly comprehensive in scope, and popular in tone.[12] The major topics under discussion in these treatises quickly became the standard ones in Christian/Muslim controversies. They are the Trinity, the Incarnation, Baptism, Eucharist, veneration of the cross, the direction to be faced in prayer, and several other Christian practices which Muslims found to be either objectionable or puzzling. Along with these topics, almost as a constantly accompanying theme of the discussion, we also find in these apologetic treatises a preoccupation with the general question about how one may discern the true religion, among the conflicting claims of several creeds, scriptures, and proposed messengers of God. ᶜAmmār al-Baṣrī explains the difficulty in his *Kitāb al-masā'il wa l-aǧwibah.*

> How are we to distinguish between a religion having order and consistency, which depends on signs and proof *(burhān)*, and a religion that is due to human contrivance, having no signs or proof? We see many different peoples professing contrasting religions. In their possession are scriptures that differ about command and prohibition, laws and statutes, as well as raising [of the dead] and resurrection. Each sect of them claims that their book is God's covenant for his creation, which his messengers have brought, and that in its behalf he has made manifest his signs and his proof at their hands.[13]

To borrow Abū Qurrah's phraseology in his defense of the Gospel, the program is to recognize *(ᶜarafa)* which message is from God, to accept it *(qabila)*, and then to assert

that everything contained in it is true *(ṣaddaqa)*.[14] The search involves the comparison of one religion with another, as well as the elaboration of criteria by which the true religion may be recognized. It is this theme in the Arabic writings of the three apologists named above that is the main focus of the present inquiry.

II. *The Most Credible Religion*

In his *Treatise on the Existence of God and the True Religion,* Abū Qurrah evokes the image of a simple mountaineer who is forced by necessity to come down from his wild haunts to the civilization of the cities of the plain. Here he meets representatives of the major religions *(adyān)*. They each solicit his allegiance, and so he must decide which of them is credible. With this scenario Abū Qurrah sets off on his review of the contemporary religions and elaborates the criteria which he considers to be adequate for discerning the true religion, "according to which [God] must be worshipped."[15] Abū Qurrah's image of an unlearned, but naturally good, man wandering in quest of God among the upholders of the several religious traditions reflects his concern to discover a defense of Christianity's credibility in the Muslim milieu that he thinks will be a sufficient argument to convince people of all levels of intelligence. As he puts it, the argument must be equally convincing to the wise, the mediocre, and the stupid.[16]

All three of the controversialists with whom we are concerned here shared the aims we have described by citing Abū Qurrah's stated purposes. Their arguments in view of this theme have three interconnecting major *foci*. They are, first of all, the traditional Christian apologetic approach, based on miracles and prophecies. Secondly, on the basis of a set of their own criteria of evaluation, they each compare Christianity and its teachings, scriptures, and prophets, with the same elements to be found in the other contemporary religions. Thirdly, they each develop a set of negative criteria to be used in discounting all but Christianity from the claim to be the true religion. In their formulation of it, this negative measure of religious credibility is an original contribution to apologetics on the part of the Christian controversialists who wrote in the Syriac/Arabic tradition. It is this specific subject that I shall discuss here.

The general apologies for Christianity written by Abū Qurrah, Abū Rā'iṭah, and ᶜAmmār all have it in common that they do not bring up their own confessional differences in the course of their arguments in support of Christianity as the true religion. The discussion of these differences have their place in anti-Muslim apologetics, in the course of discussions about the doctrine of the Incarnation. However, on the general theme of the unique credibility of the Christian religion, we find not only no reference to sectarian differences among these writers, but they all use the same arguments, *mutatis mutandis,* differing only in the skill and comprehensiveness of their depolyment, as we shall see. While most of the elements to be found in the apologetics of the Christians who wrote during the first Abbasid century are theologically quite traditional, their own socio/religious situation was virtually unprecedented up to that time. This point must be emphasized. It is simply stated. Christians in the traditional homeland of the Syriac speaking peoples lived under the rule of *Islam*. They lived as a protected, tolerated, sometimes harrassed, subject population — in return for the payment of a poll tax *(al-ǧizyah),* and the maintenance of a low social profile, as demanded in the *Qur'ān (at-*

Tawbah 9:29). Further, the implementation of the low social profile was regulated by conditions set forth in such legal documents as the covenant of ᶜUmar.[17] Here, among other things, it is stipulated: "If any of you says of the prophet, of God's book, or his religion what is unfitting, he is debarred from the protection of God, the commander of the faithful, and all Muslims."[18] Hence we find only a sparse mention of the proper names of Islam (for example, Muḥammad, *al-Qur'ān, al-Islām*) in Christian Arabic apologies. And yet Islam is the major opposing faith, against whose claims the arguments are deployed. This fact necessarily affects the tenor of the apologies. Their references to Islam are oblique. But Islamic challenges to Christians have determined the content and even the structure of the whole Christian apologetic enterprise in Arabic. To use their frequent word for it, the Christian controversialists are attempting in their writings to provide that 'proof' *(al-burhān)* for their religious allegations that would fulfill the *Qur'ān*'s injunction, delivered on several occasions when the prophet encountered members of other religions, "Produce your proof, if you speak truly" (*al-Baqarah* 2:111). It is for this reason that ᶜAmmār al-Baṣrī calls his general apology for Christianity *Kitāb al-burhān,* that is, *The Book of the Proof.* And so contrariwise the Muslim Ibn al-Munaǧǧim named his letter challenging the faith of the Nestorian scholar, Ḥunayn ibn Isḥāq (d. 873), *al-Burhān.*[19]

Comparing Religions

Abū Qurrah, Abū Rā'iṭah, and ᶜAmmār each defend the credibility of the Christian religion by comparing it with the other contemporary religions and highlighting what they consider to be the superior qualities of Christianity. In this manner they hope to demonstrate that Christianity alone has an unimpeachable, naturally intelligible claim on human religious allegiance. The working out of this apologetic argument is built on the philosophical premise that human reason can discover the existence of the creator God, and then conclude that mankind is the highest expression of created values. The perfections present in human beings, the argument assumes, must be in some way reflective of the qualities of the God who created them. Accordingly, one should be able to discern the true religion, and the true messenger of God, by determining which one of the many claimants to this role most credibly describes God and his requirements for his creatures — according to the measure of the highest human perfections of which we are aware. This process of discernment has two complementary phases. On the positive side one should test the doctrines of the several religions against what we may know of our own perfections by the rigorous use of our minds. On the negative side, one should determine that there are no unworthy, imperfect traits in any specific faith-system which may be alleged as factors to motivate a person to profess that particular religion independently of divine endorsement. Needless to say, the three apologists with whom we are concerned here, all attempt to demonstrate that Christianity alone of the contemporary religions is worthy of credence from these perspectives.

Modern scholars have pointed out the Neoplatonic character of this course of apologetic argument. One scholar, Gerhard Klinge, has even alleged that Abū Qurrah's general apology for Christianity is a distinctive representative of what he calls, "the Syrian *Religionsphilosophie.*" It can, he says, be put right alongside of the Greek writings of Nemesius of Emesa (fl. c. 390) in terms of its use of Neoplatonic

philosophical principles for purposes of Christian apologetics.[20] It is worth noting in this connection that it was the intellectual pressure of Islam that drove the Christian apologists back to their Greek philosophical sources for the raw materials with which they could build a new defense of Christianity. It was precisely for this purpose, as a matter of fact, that the Nestorian patriarch, Timothy I (d. 823), himself an able apologist, asked a friend to search for a copy of Nemesius' "On the nature of man" in the library of the convent of Mār Mattī near Mosul.[21] The Neo-Platonic philosophy of the late antique world, with its well digested Aristotelian elements, became the backbone of the Christian intellectual growth in the early Middle Ages. It also had a considerable influence among Muslim thinkers.[22] But each religious community cast these philosophical presuppositions in the mold of its own distinctive creed.

In the works of the Christian apologists who wrote in Arabic, the thought of such earlier Christian Neoplatonists as Gregory of Nyssa, Pseudo-Dionysius, and John Philoponos is readily evident. In their own times these thinkers had defended the Christian faith against non-Christian, Neoplatonist intellectuals such as Proclus, Porphyry and even Galen, who had earlier written attacks against the Christians.[23] Relying on the achievements of the earlier generations, Abū Qurrah, Abū Rā'iṭah, and ᶜAmmār set up their own treatises in terms of the theodicy that had been elaborated there. But they adapted the arguments to suit the requirements of their own controversy with the Muslims. In the process, the differences between Muslim and Christian approaches to religious questions become apparent. Nowhere is this more evident than in the discussions about how one may discern the true religion.

Abū Qurrah based his argument on this topic on the systematic comparison of the doctrines of the several religions about God, the permitted and the forbidden, and reward and punishment. He concluded that Christianity's doctrines alone accord with what a reasonable person should expect to be true. Abū Qurrah's ideas on this subject have been studied before.[24] But in his *Kitāb al-burhān* ᶜAmmār al-Baṣrī rejects Abū Qurrah's approach. Rather, on the basis of a list of negative criteria for the discernment of the true religion, which he shared with his fellow Christian apologists of the period, he constructed a unique argument in favor of Christianity's credibility. It is to this argument that we shall now turn our attention.

ᶜAmmār al-Basrī and the Recognition of the True Religion

As a prelude to the development of his theory about the responsible discernment of the true religion, ᶜAmmār describes what he considers to be a consensus *(iǧmāᶜ)* among the world's several religions about the oneness of God.

The major religions, says ᶜAmmār, expressly confess one God (*ilāh wāḥid*). They are Christianity (*an-Naṣrāniyyah*), Judaism (*al-Yahūdiyyah*), and Islam (*al-Islāmiyyah*). Others, such as the Magians, the Manichaeans, and the followers of Bar Dayṣān admit an element of "associationism" (*aš-širk*) with their dualism. They believe in two eternal beings. "But along with their blunder," he says, "they believe in only one God because they do not call the other one a god. Rather they call him abominable filth."[25] Even Greek philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle testify that God is one, ᶜAmmār reminds the reader. While idol worshippers, who call all of their idols gods, say that above them all there is a god over whom there is no other. Therefore, in a certain sense, we may

speak of an agreement on the part of all the people of the world in asserting the oneness of God's being (*tawḥīd ǧawhar Allāh*). However, when it comes to recognizing "the religion on the earth that is a religion which God wants for all of his creatures,"[26] one should look for reasonable evidences (*dalā'il*), ᶜAmmār proposes, and not rely on uncritical faith or credulity (*at-taqlīd*).

Evidences of the True Religion

ᶜAmmār takes it for granted that all of his readers will agree that God is wise (*ḥakīm*). Accordingly, he argues, we must know that God has created us for a purpose beyond what is evident in our earthly lives. Someone who is wise does not destroy the product of his own work except to make it thrive in some other way. Therefore, we should expect that God would communicate to us the good news (*al-bušrā*) of what he has prepared for us in the next life, and that he would put the report of it into a scripture (*kitāb*), so that it might not be forgotten, but be passed along from generation to generation. Given the propensity of men to harm one another, this book doubtless also includes God's command (*amr*) and prohibition (*nahy*) in the realm of human behavior. Furthermore, since we prize what we have gained by our own deserts over what is given to us gratuitously, it is reasonable to infer that the wise God intends us to acquire (*iktisāb*) our eternal reward by dint of our own effort (*iǧtihād*), according to our own worthiness (*istiḥqāq*). Given all of this that we may infer about God, ᶜAmmār concludes,

> Therefore we must know that he has commanded mankind to do good and to exert effort in worshipping from this viewpoint; and that he has put it into writing so that it will not be forgotten, and so that posterity might inherit it and learn about it.
>
> It is clear then that God has a religion (*dīn*) on the earth, which he wants for all of his creatures.[27]

There are in fact many religions, and ᶜAmmār has this advice for those who must make a choice among them.

> We should put them on a par with one another and be wary of taking a stand on any of them without the argument (*al-ḥuǧǧah*) holding true for us. And if it is God's religion, then we should believe in it, and accept it, and drop whatever is other than it.[28]

The focus of attention is then the argument (*al-ḥuǧǧah*) which may be proposed in support of the truth claims of any one of the contemporary religions. According to ᶜAmmār there are two ways in which such an argument may hold true. The first of them is that we should see signs (*āyāt*) in one of the religions which are such that no human being could produce the like of them. We should then have to testify that this is God's religion. The second way in which an argument of the sort we are discussing may hold true is by means of a reasonable demonstration (*bi dalālati ᶜaqlin*), the like of which cannot be feigned, to the effect that such miraculous signs were present at the appearance of a given religion, even if they are no longer present in its condition of establishment.

ᶜAmmār points out that it is God who produces these confirmatory signs at the hands of someone who calls people to accept (*ad-dāᶜī*) the religion that God wants to bring to their attention by means of the signs. The signs themselves are the argument in virtue of which the religion stands true for the people. Whenever God has guided people to his

religion in the past, ᶜAmmār maintains, and he has set up an argument for it, he has produced such signs. The reference here of course is to the record of signs and miracles to be found in the Old and New Testaments.

Thus far ᶜAmmār's argument parallels the standard apologetic argument based on miracles. But for ᶜAmmār this position is merely the first step in a more elaborate apologetic argument that owes no small debt, as we shall see, to the milieu of Muslim scholarship that prevailed during the first Abbasid century.

ᶜAmmār thinks that everyone would agree that God's religion is indicated by the divine signs that are worked in its behalf. The problem is that as he searched among the contemporary religions he could find none in which such signs were currently appearing. In terms of the dichotomy he had proposed for discerning the truth value of any religion's claim to allegiance, this fact meant that he must then turn to the second way in which any religion's argument for its legitimacy may be found to hold true. That is to say, he must search to see if there is a proof from reason to the effect that such confirmatory signs were once present, at the inauguration of anyone of the competing religions. This proof from reason would then sustain that religion's claim to be God's religion.

ᶜAmmār obviously felt a need to justify this state of affairs, namely, that God had ceased working public miracles in behalf of his religion, so that the believer would have to defend his faith by way of a proof from reason to the effect that the miraculous signs had once been in evidence. Once again ᶜAmmār proposes a dichotomy. Either we must maintain that God has ceased giving religious guidance to his creatures at the very time when they are most in need of it because of the plurality of religions claiming to be God's one religion. Or we must conclude that for some reason God prefers to guide people to his religion through a process of inference (*al-istidlāl*) on their part. In this way they might derive their own testimony (*aš-šahādah*) to the fact that God's religion was indeed established and accepted in the world on the basis of the miraculous signs worked in its behalf by its original messengers (*ar-rusul*). From all that we know about the merciful God, the first option must be excluded, ᶜAmmār concludes. So the second option must be true.

But why should God prefer to guide people to his religion on the basis of a process of inference about the original presence of divine signs, rather than by the continuing public manifestation of such signs? ᶜAmmār's answer to this question is as follows. The continued manifestation of signs on God's part would amount to "applying force (*al-iǧbār*) to people to enter into the religion, and so bring to nought their praiseworthiness for it. The occurrence would also amount to forcing them to obey him, which God detests."[29]

If this argument sounds a bit farfetched, we should recall the context in which ᶜAmmār is proposing it. On the one hand he is committed to upholding the apologetic value of miracles. As we shall see below, he believes that they are rejected in the *Qur'ān* as grounds for accepting Islam. On the other hand, in the face of the Muslim charges that the acceptance of Christianity amounts to an uncritical acceptance (*at-taqlīd*) of unreasonable doctrines,[30] ᶜAmmār must argue that one may profess Christianity on the basis of a responsible intellectual conviction. But on this score, as we shall see below, he is also anxious to reject the argument that this intellectual conviction may derive from a

critical examination of each one of the doctrines themselves. Finally, his reference to forced obedience recalls a number of other intellectual concerns. The first of these is ᶜAmmār's idea, noted above, that a wise God intends man to acquire his eternal reward by dint of his own effort, according to his own worthiness. Further, his concern about God's hatred of forced obedience recalls the contemporary Muslim debate about man's power of willing and God's determination of his acts. In this discussion the term *iǧbār,* which may be translated as 'force,' or 'compulsion,' had a wide currency.[31] As we shall see, in this controversy ᶜAmmār clearly associates himself with the opponents of the *muǧbirūn*, that is, 'the determinists,' to use the nickname given to them in the debates of the time. Force, of course, should have no place among the motives of credibility for any religion according to ᶜAmmār. The inventiveness of his present argument lies in his notion that the actual presence of miracles could be considered as a species of force. He deals with some of the implications of this notion as he proceeds to develop the argument. For the moment his conclusion is as follows.

> When he disclosed his religion by means of his signs, and the argument for it (*ḥuǧǧatuhu*) came to consist in this, and he knew that his religion would oblige the reasonable person to testify that it was established in the world be means of these signs and tokens (*al-aᶜlām*), God took away the public production of them.[32]

ᶜAmmār plans to proceed from this point to discuss how one may search through the contemporary faith communities to discover the true religion on the basis of the appearance of divine signs at its inauguration in the world. But prior to his elaboration of a set of criteria for conducting the investigation, he pauses to deal with a rival Christian apologetic methodology which proposes that an intellectual comparison of the doctrines of the several religions should reveal which one of them is God's religion. It seems as if ᶜAmmār is rejecting precisely the sort of apologetic enterprise which Abū Qurrah proposes.

A disputatious person (*al-mutaᶜannit*), ᶜAmmār claims, is likely to maintain the following principle.

> One may distinguish God's religion and its scripture from the rest of the religions and scriptures without the signs. A person should look into what the religions in the whole world claim. He should examine with his mind their scriptures and the scriptures of those who oppose them. He should make his investigation into this matter meticulous and precise until by means of it he can differentiate the soundest in terms of meaning (*maᶜnā*), the most forceful of them in terms of doctrine (*maḏhab*), and the most correct of them in discourse (*kalām*). Then he should determine about it that it is from God — more adequate than any other one regarding soundness (*ṣaḥḥah*) of meaning, and force (*quwah*) of doctrine, and correctness (*ṣawāb*) of discourse.[33]

ᶜAmmār's most basic objection to this program is that, in his opinion, it is an elitist proposal, and in the end unjust. There are dull-witted people in the world, as well as bright ones, ᶜAmmār reminds his readers. Because of the intellectual disability of the dull-witted in the face of so many conflicting systems of religious thought, an approach of this sort implies that God does not in fact want dull-witted people to be rightly guided

(*yahtadī*) to his religion. But God in his justice is far removed from imposing an obligation on people for the accomplishment of what is beyond their capability. As a matter of fact, ᶜAmmār continues to argue, intelligent people would be just as much disabled in their search for the true religion as are the less well endowed, because religious matters are notoriously deeper and more obscure than worldly affairs. They require explanations from God's messengers, who give a warranty for the truth of what they say in the divine signs that are worked at their hands. Private individuals, on the other hand, even very intelligent ones, have a tendency to be convinced only of their own ways of thinking, and to give unquestioning acceptance (*at-taqlīd*) only to their own opinions. ᶜAmmār then advances the following conclusion.

> Unquestioning acceptance of the signs springs from the use of reason. But unquestioning acceptance of anyone whose mind has conducted an inquiry independently of the signs springs from ignorance.[34]

What God has imposed on the bright and the dull-witted alike, ᶜAmmār insists, is that they search for the signs which God has worked at the hands of his messengers as the surest way to recognize his religion.

ᶜAmmār's rejection of an approach to the discernment of the true religion, which so closely parallels the approach proposed by Abū Qurrah in his *Treatise on the Existence of the Creator and the True Religion*, should not blind us to the fact that the overall structure of the general apologetic enterprise is the same in both authors. Their disagreement, albeit substantial in its own sphere, concerns only one phase of the argument. They propose different systems of reference for their comparison of the religions which are competing with one another to be recognized as God's religion. Neither one of them doubts that a reasonable scheme for discerning the true religion may be devised. Moreover, even their manifest difference of opinion in this process of argument should not be exaggerated. Abū Qurrah's approach to the whole question is not limited to the one he proposed in the *Treatise on the Existence of the Creator and the True Religion.* He too supports the apologetic value of divine signs and miracles. And in his *Treatise on the Justification of the Law of Moses and the Justification of Orthodoxy*, he also argues that miracles alone are a sufficient proof of divine approval of a religion for all kinds of people, the stupid, the mediocre, and the intelligent.[35] While ᶜAmmār himself, in his *Kitāb al-masā'il wa l-aǧwibah*, develops a line of argument in favor of the truth of Christianity which comes close to the sort of argument he rejects in his *Kitāb al-burhān*, it highlights the reasonableness of Christian descriptions of God, as opposed to Muslim ones.[36] ᶜAmmār's own genius here in the *Kitāb al-burhān*, as we shall see, lies in his synthesis of elements which are common to himself, to Abū Qurrah, and to Abū Rā'iṭah and others among the Christian apologists.

Before turning our attention more closely to ᶜAmmār's further development of this argument, we should note in passing his penchant for using Arabic words and phrases which have a distinctly Islamic ring to them, either because they are used in the *Qur'ān*, or had a currency in contemporary Muslim thought. This same feature of his controversial style is also evident in the way in which he phrases his conviction that God is above imposing an obligation on people for what is beyond their capability. He employs language that recalls the current concern among the Muslim *mutakallimūn* with God's *taklīf*, or imposition of duties, and man's ability to respond to it.[37] This issue was

discussed as part of the controversy about the limits of man's power to will, to which we made reference above. To express what he considered to be the evil of imposing unattainable duties ᶜAmmār employs the phrase, "*taklīf an-nās mā lā yuṭīqūna.*"[38] Certain of the Muslim *mutakallimūn* commonly used for the same purpose the phrase, "*taklīf mā lā yuṭāq.*"[39] The *Qur'ān*, of course, assures the reader that God does not impose a duty (*yukallifu*) on a soul without the soul's having the means to accomplish it (for example, in *al-Baqarah* 2:233). We should not make too much of such a terminological congruence between ᶜAmmār and the Muslims. But it does reinforce our conviction that ᶜAmmār intends to speak in a way that is readily comprehensible to Muslims, when we see him using phrases that had a currency in their own contemporary disputes.

Having disposed of the proposal for a doctrinal comparison of religions for the purpose of discerning which one of them is God's religion, ᶜAmmār returns to his argument that the true religion may be recognized only by way of the signs worked in its behalf by divine allowance when it was first established in the world. He advances the following premise, which takes his argument a further step.

> Intelligent people will be obliged to confess one of the religions because it was established in the world on account of God's signs, only when they do not find in it any one of the motives of this world *(asbāb ad-dunyā),* which by its persistence, could enable it [that is, the religion] to be established.[40]

It is with this premise that ᶜAmmār introduces the notion of negative criteria into his apologetic argument. We must be careful to grasp his point accurately. He maintains, as we have seen, that in his own day God had not been actively producing miraculous signs *(al-āyāt)* that would appear publicly in behalf of the claims of any one of the competing religious communities. ᶜAmmār takes this observation to be self-evident. According to him, God ceased to work such public signs, even in behalf of the true religion, because he wants people to testify to his religion on the basis of their own intellectual search among the several religious communities, to discover which one of them is guaranteed as the true religion by the appearance of miraculous signs at its establishment in the world. But such miraculous signs have clearly appeared at the establishment of at least two of the religions. They are Judaism and Christianity. So ᶜAmmār must devise a rational way to retain his reliance on the miraculous signs, and yet to specify the conditions under which their presence at the establishment of Christianity may be thought to be a decisive argument in its favor, and at the same time to exclude the claims of Judaism. He offers the following proposal.

> When it is possible in our view for a religion to be established because of one of the earthly motives *(asbāb al-arḍ)* on account of which people may be led to agreement about something, one is not obliged to testify that it was established on account of the signs.[41]

ᶜAmmār explains the basis for the supposition contained in this proposal as follows.

> Had God known that in his religion there would be something which should enable intelligent people to imagine that it was established in the world on that account, he would not have taken the signs away from it.[42]

Judaism is ᶜAmmār's case in point. Throughout their history, he claims, God worked miraculous signs in behalf of the Jews. He ceased doing so only with the establishment of Christianity. According to ᶜAmmār, God provided even more convincing miraculous signs in support of Christianity than he had worked in favor of Judaism. But prior to the establishment of Christianity God continously worked his miracles at the hands of his Jewish messengers, throughout Jewish history, because in Judaism one may find grounds, in addition to the miraculous signs, which one may imagine to be motives for the establishment of Judaism as a religion — independently of the miraculous signs as motives of credibility. It is otherwise with Christianity, ᶜAmmār argues. When Christianity appeared, God worked miracles at the hands of the apostles until their religion was established worldwide. Then he ceased providing miracles in its behalf.

On the basis of this somewhat premature comparison of the state of miracles in Judaism and Christianity, ᶜAmmār puts forward the following program for his continuing inquiry.

> Since we have made it clear that God's religion obliges intelligent people [to conclude] that it has been established in the world because of God's signs only when no motive other than them can be found in it, because of which it could have been established, I shall begin to examine one by one the religions that lay claim to the signs. Any religion in which it is possible for us to imagine that there is a motive for the like of which a religion could be established, . . . , we know that it is not God's religion, which he wants for all of his creatures, and in which he wills to include his whole creation.[43]

ᶜAmmār begins his examination with Judaism. And it is in connection with Judaism that he first lists those reasons or motives which he considers to be evidence that any religion in which they are found cannot be God's religion, once God has ceased working miraculous signs in behalf of that religion. From this perspective, at this point in his *Kitāb al-burhān,* ᶜAmmār examines only Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.[44] One may suppose that he believes that all of the other religions he has named should be excluded from serious consideration because they have no record of divine signs worked in their behalf.

For the present ᶜAmmār lists five motives in addition to miraculous signs, which in his judgment would be sufficiently persuasive to ground the establishment of a religion in the world. They are: the sword *(as-sayf),* bribes and cajolery *(ar-rišan wa l-muṣānaᶜah),* ethnic bigotry *(al-ᶜaṣabiyyah),* personal preference *(al-istiḥsān),* and tribal collusion *(at-tawāṭu').*[45]

ᶜAmmār is not always consistent when he lists the unworthy motives for the establishment or acceptance of a religion. Just two pages following the list we have quoted he says, "After tribal collusion *(at-tawāṭu')* there are six motives. . . . We should investigate whether acceptance is possible on their account, without the signs. The first is the sword. The second is what is desirable of wealth, dominion, and strength *(ar-raghā'ib min al-amwāl, wa r-ri'āsah, wa l-ᶜizz).* The third is ethnic bigotry. The fourth is personal preference. The fifth is licentious laws *(at-tarḫīṣ fī š-šarā'iᶜ).* The sixth is the phantoms of sorcery *(ḫayālāt as-siḥr)* and the like."[46] In his *Kitāb al-masā'il wa l-aǧwibah* ᶜAmmār also lists six characteristics or traits *(al-ḫiṣāl)* which he thinks should indicate that any religion in which they are found is a human fabrication. They are: personal preference, licentious laws, the sword, gifts and presents of the desirable things of this world *(al-mawāhib wa ᶜaṭāyā min raghā'ib ad-dunyah),* fanaticism and the

exercise of ethnic bigotry *(ḥamiyyah wa taᶜaṣṣub)*, and the observance of the phantoms of sorcery *(muᶜāyanah hayāl ... min as-siḥr)*.[47] The variations in ᶜAmmār's lists of these negative qualities merely serve to highlight the drift of his thinking. His argument is that if one finds any such motives, grounds, or traits in any religion, then it is possible for him to allege that this religion is successful in the world because of the attractiveness or the forcefulness of these qualities, rather than because of any recognizable divine endorsement of that religion.

ᶜAmmār was not alone among the early Christian, Arabic speaking apologists in drawing up such a list of characteristics which should enable a searcher to exclude the claim of any religion to be God's religion if it possesses one or more of these characteristics. The practice of utilizing such an argument is common to most of the Christian apologists of the first Abbasid century whose works we know. Abū Quarrah wrote a small treatise which argues that the true religion is the one that avoids acceptance because of license *(ar-ruhṣah)*, strength *(al-ᶜizz)*, the exercise of ethnic bigotry *(at-taᶜaṣṣub)*, and the satisfaction of the vulgar mind *(qunūᶜ al-ᶜaql as-sūqī)*.[48] In his *Epistle on the Confirmation of the Christian Religion and the Confirmation of the Holy Trinity* Abū Rā'iṭah argues that there are six categories *(aqsām)* of inducement to religious conviction *(iᶜtiqād)* which are unworthy reasons for professing any given creed. They are worldly desire *(ar-raghbah)*, ambition *(aṭ-ṭamaᶜ)*, overpowering fear *(ar-rahbah al-qā hirah)*, license *(ar-ruhṣah)*, personal preference *(al-istiḥsan)*, and collusion, or ethnic bigotry *(at-tawāṭu', al-ᶜaṣabiyyah)*.[49] And finally the Nestorian scholar Ḥunayn ibn Isḥāq, pursues this same line of reasoning in the course of his response to the challenge proposed to him by the Muslim scholar Ibn al-Munaggim. He says,

> What is true and false of all the doctrines is known only from the motives *(asbāb)* for their acceptance initially. The motives for which falsehood is accepted are other than the motives for which the truth is accepted. There are six motives for the acceptance of falsehood. The first of them is that the one accepting it is unwillingly compelled to accept that to which he has been brought over. The second is that a man is willingly fleeing from oppression and violence when he cannot bear them. So because of them he is converted to that from which he hopes for ease and comfort. The third is that one chooses might over meekness, nobility over lowliness, and strength over weakness. So he leaves his own religion and is converted to another one. The fourth is that the adherent of a doctrine is a deceitful man who is crafty in speech. So he confuses and prevails over those to whom he is appealing. The fifth is that he takes advantage of the ignorance and the lack of manners of those to whom he appeals. The sixth is that there should be the fervor of natural kinship on the part of those making the appeal. So one would not want to break off that tie that is between himself and one who agrees with him in religion.[50]

The similarities and the differences in these several lists of unacceptable grounds for religious commitment are readily evident. The overall argument that is employed by the apologists from the three opposing Christian sects is virtually identical in its main lines. There are some differences in the way in which each author deploys the argument, as well as in the terminology that each one uses to name the unsuitable motives for faith. This

fact suggests that the authors are not simply copying this argument from some earlier source. Rather, once inspired by the same method of procedure, each author carries on his apology in his own terms. We can no longer determine whose original idea it was to discuss the unworthy incentives to religious faith, and to argue that only Christianity avoids acceptance because of one or another of these motives. No such argument seems to have been employed by earlier Christian apologists. Perhaps in the form in which we find it here, the argument is an original contribution to apologetics on the part of the anti-Muslim apologists of the first Abbasid century.

The closest analogue in Christian apologetic literature to this negative criterion for discerning the true religion, as it is deployed by ᶜAmmār and his fellow apologists of the first Abbasid century, seems to be a portion of the apologetic argument for Christianity developed by Roger Bacon (c. 1214 — c. 1292) in his *Opus Majus*. The argument is to be found in the seventh part of this work, entitled *Moralis Philosophia*, part 4.[51] In the course of it, Bacon compares the religions of the peoples whom he calls pagans, idolators, Tartars, Jews, Christians, and the Saracens. All of them except the Christians, he argues, foster the pursuit of human happiness in terms of one or several of five corrupt goals. These goals are, in his words, "voluptas, divicie, honor, potencia, fama seu gloria nominis."[52] One can readily see the similarity of this list of corrupt goals of human behavior to the lists of unworthy motives for religious faith that we have been reviewing from the works of the three Christian apologists who wrote in Arabic. Bacon says that in formulating his argument, he is relying on al-Fārābī's, and Boethius', development of Aristotle's ideas in the *Politics*.[53] It is not unlikely that the inspiration for the development of this same mode of argument also came to ᶜAmmār, Abū Qurrah, and Abū Rā'iṭah from Aristotle. As we have seen, a distinguishing feature of their apologetics is their reliance on a re-presentation of ideas found in the general Christian, philosophic tradition which was largely inherited from the thinkers who created the late Neoplatonic synthesis of thought.

Motives for the Acceptance of Christianity

ᶜAmmār argues that Christianity is the only religion that God endorses by means of the divine signs that he produced at the hands of the apostles, when they first preached Christianity throughout the world. He claims that no trace can be found for anyone's acceptance of Christianity on the basis of any one or more of the unworthy motives for the acceptance of a religion that he has listed. No such claim can be made in behalf of any one of the other religions, ᶜAmmār maintains. Therefore Christianity alone is God's religion.

Judaism and Islam are the only two non-Christian religions whose bid for acceptance as the one true religion ᶜAmmār discusses in his *Kitāb al-burhān*. In his brief discussion of Judaism, as we have seen, he argues that Judaism cannot be God's religion, in the present day absence of public miraculous signs worked in its behalf, because it is possible to imagine that people may embrace it on account of some one or another of the unworthy motives for religious faith. When it comes to Islam, however, we are unsure of the full content of ᶜAmmār's argument. As we mentioned above, the text we have is missing at least one page.

It is clear that ᶜAmmār believed that ethnic bigotry and tribal collusion played a role

in the original acceptance of Islam. He mentions these two unworthy motives for the acceptance of a religion in the portion of his argument that is available to us.[54] But his point of emphasis in discounting Islam's claim to be the true religion is that the *Qur'ān* rejects the idea that Muḥammad's preaching should be endorsed by miraculous signs. ᶜAmmār quotes two passages from the *Qur'ān* to this effect, namely, *al-Isrā'* (17):59 and *al-Anᶜām* (6):109. He also claims that according to an interpretation of ᶜAbd Allāh ibn al-ᶜAbbās, a noteworthy companion of the prophet to whom many traditions are ascribed in Muslim sources,[55] the rejection of miraculous signs recorded in *al-Anᶜām* came on the occasion of an oath sworn by Christians, Jews, and polytheists that if they should see such a sign worked at the hands of Muḥammad they would put their faith in him.[56] The Christians and Jews are not in fact explicitly mentioned in the passage quoted from *al-Anᶜām*. And ᶜAmmār's purpose is not so much to argue that an oath from Christians occasioned the rejection of miracles. Rather his purpose is to prove that any appeal to miracles made by Muslims in behalf of Islam's claim to be the true religion is ruled out *a priori* by the *Qur'ān*. As we have seen, ᶜAmmār himself maintained that divine endorsement of a religion must be in the form of miraculous signs. There is some evidence to suggest that Muslim apologists in his day were making reference in their arguments in favor of Islam to stories of miracles worked by Muḥammad, as these are reported in popular traditions, as well as to the doctrine of the *iᶜǧāz al-Qur'ān*, that is, the inimitability of Quranic literary style.[57] ᶜAmmār therefore intends to discount arguments of this sort, as having no value in recommending Islam as God's religion.

The centerpiece of ᶜAmmār's account of the motives for accepting Christianity instead of any other religion, in both his *Kitāb al-burhān* and his *Kitāb al-masā'il wa l-aǧwibah*, is a demonstration that, given the nature of Christianity and its demands, it is inconceivable that anyone could be brought to profess it for any one or several of the unworthy reasons for accepting a religion. In this connection it is noteworthy that ᶜAmmār puts forward his arguments in terms of conversion from one religion to another, rather than in reference to some hypothetical, uncommitted context in which a person could choose between the several competing religious traditions that are recommending themselves. Conversion was, of course, the experience of most of the first Christians. And conversion, we may suspect, is the temptation of many Christians in ᶜAmmār's day. He is anxious to prove that conversion from one religious community *(al-millah)* to another is usually accomplished only on the basis of one or several of the unacceptable motives for faith — except in the instance of Christianity. It is inconceivable, he maintains, that anyone could embrace Christianity for any of these reasons. "Rather," he says of the Christian religion, "it forces the mind to other things, namely, signs and miracles."[58] This, of course, is the whole point of ᶜAmmār's apologetic argument.

ᶜAmmār makes his point by discussing each one of the unworthy characteristics *(ḫiṣāl)* and motives *(asbāb)*, and how it has no place in Christianity. Unlike other religions, Christianity is not to be found only among one people, in any one country, or limited to a particular language group. In fact Christians are widespread among peoples who are traditionally hostile to one another. Therefore it is inconceivable that the religion could have been established by means of some sort of tribal collusion among the nations.

Regarding the sword, ᶜAmmār says the following.

> The whole world that is opposed to the Christian religion, the Jews, the Maǧūs, the Muslims and others, agree that Christ's disciples did not conquer people by the sword, not did they use it. Rather, the most that the Jews can ascribe to them is sorcery and trickery, rather than the sword. While the Maǧūs and the Muslims think of them in regard to the signs.[59]

The last sentence, obviously, expresses the very conclusion for which ᶜAmmār is arguing.

Bribery and cajolery cannot be considered motives for the original acceptance of Christianity. Its original preachers *(ad-duᶜah)*, ᶜAmmār reminds the reader, were poor men who had nothing to offer but their own poverty and the counsel to their followers to cultivate penury in this world.

Ethnic bigotry was not an element in the establishment of Christianity in the world. Otherwise, ᶜAmmār claims, only Jews would have followed Jesus. Whereas the Christian community is made up of people from every nation.

Certainly personal preference *(al-istiḥsān)* did not dictate the acceptance of Christianity in the beginning, ᶜAmmār maintains. What he means by 'personal preference' in this connection is akin to the meaning of the phrase "religious preference" in American civil parlance. It means not simply what one likes best in terms of religious groups, but what one thinks is true, on the basis of his own reasoning and personal conviction. The Arabic term *istiḥsān* has a legal nuance, meaning "to make a decision for a particular interpretation of the law as a result of one's own deliberation."[60] It is the element of one's own deliberation, his personal opinion *(ar-ra'y)*, that ᶜAmmār has in mind here. In his *Kitāb al masā'il wa l-aǧwibah* he uses the intellectual subleties of the ancient Greek systems of thought as an example of the operation of *al-istiḥsān*. And in this same connection he also makes reference to the profession of monotheism *(at-tawḥīd)* that is characteristic of the doctrine "that goes under the name of *at-tawḥīd*."[61] He undoubtedly means Islam, in which the profession of monotheism is the basic component of faith. About the central doctrines of Christianity, which ᶜAmmār lists in this section of his *Kitāb al-burhān*, he claims that it is inconceivable that *istiḥsān* could have any part in them. He says,

> I think that the Christian religion is completely contrary to it. That is because its preachers lay claim to things, and transmit reports, which opinion would not contrive, and which would not arise in thought, nor occur in a brain, nor would a mind conceive them.[62]

He is speaking of such doctrines as the virgin birth, the son of God killed and buried, the resurrection and ascension of Jesus, his second coming, the worship of someone crucified, and belief in an unknown, heavenly reward.

Christianity clearly grants no license for the pursuit of pleasure *(at-tarḫīṣ)*, ᶜAmmār argues. Anyone can read its strictures about marriage and the control of the desire for women, which ᶜAmmār maintains is the strongest human desire. In witness of this allegation he cites the example of a contemporary Muslim ruler who went so far as to invade the hostile Byzantine territory in pursuit of a woman. This interesting detail by way of example helps us to date ᶜAmmār. He is presumably speaking of the caliph al-Muᶜtaṣim's expedition to Amorium in the year 838, which was remembered in Arabic poetry as an incident instigated by a woman.[63] ᶜAmmār goes on to cite Christianity's well known penchant for asceticism.

Finally, ᶜAmmār argues that it is inconceivable that anyone should accept Christianity because of the phantoms of sorcery. The miracles and wonders of Christianity, he maintains, are not elusive. Rather, what is promised is achieved. The preachers fulfilled the conditions they set for themselves.

The conclusion of his argument is simply stated.

> The facts compel us to dissociate Christianity from the earthly motives by reason of which other [religions] are established, in favor of the testimony that it was accepted and established by clear signs from God, and propogated among all of the different nations by reason of its reliably true distinguishing marks.[64]

Therefore, according to ᶜAmmār, we have a compelling, intellectually respectable reason to believe that Christianity is the only true religion.

III. *Islam and the Christian Apologetic Theology of the First Abbasid Century*

Students of Islam have long been tantalized by the manifold similarities between various aspects of the Islamic science of religious discourse *(ᶜilm al-kalām)* and Christian, largely Greek, philosophical theology. Since so much of this philosophical theology found expression in the Syriac monastic and scholastic traditions that were at home in Iraq where the Muslim sciences were born after the Abbasid revolution, it is not unreasonable that one should expect to find in the Christian traditions at least the traces of the ideas that would be elaborated in Muslim scholarship. In this context it is not surprising that modern western scholars should search among the writings of the Muslim *mutakallimūn* for "parallelisms which betray dependence."[65] Some scholars have even carried this enterprise to the point of suggesting earlier Christian or Jewish parallels for practically every significant doctrinal formulation to be found in Muslim theology, regardless of its own Islamic context, and sometimes heedless of the philosophical and linguistic presuppositions in terms of which it is phrased.[66]

Contrariwise, there has also been no paucity of scholars to deny the dependence of the *mutakallimūn* on Christian sources. For the fact is that while there are many tantalizing similarities to Christian doctrines and formulations to be found in the writings of the Muslim thinkers, the differences are equally striking. From its inception Islamic religious discourse is recognizably and uniquely Islamic, and distinctly non-Christian in its thought, format, and style.[67] Already in 1842 this fact encouraged Augustus Schmölders to maintain that there is no relation between the Muslim *mutakallimūn* and the Christian apologists.[68] And most recently Richard M. Frank, on the basis of his extensive study of the works of some of the most significant Muslim *mutakallimūn* from the Basrian school of the *Muᶜtazilah,* remarks:

> "In order to understand the *kalām* ... one needs only the native language and tradition of Arab Islam ... This is not to say that the *kalām* contains no parallels with and no clear dependences upon the pagan and Christian traditions that preceded it, but rather that these dependences are chiefly to be sought on a deeper level. Most of the basic issues, though in a real sense (and for us unavoidably) 'Greek,' are nevertheless framed and conceived in an Islamic mode and must be so read."[69]

It is difficult, if not impossible, to isolate and to identify with any specificity the "deeper level" on which there lie the dependences of the Muslim scholars on the works of Christian apologists. But it is not difficult to demonstrate that the Muslim *mutakallimūn* of the first Abbasid century were aware of the Christian apologists who were writing and teaching in their midst. Ample documentation for this fact is easily provided. We have already cited reports from the *Fihrist* of Ibn an-Nadīm about the controversies of Abū Qurrah and ᶜAmmār al-Baṣrī with the Muᶜtazilites al-Murdār and Abū al-Huḏhayl respectively.[70] In addition, Ibn an-Nadīm mentions more general refutations of Christians written by such ninth century Muslim scholars as Ḍirār b. ᶜAmr, Abū ᶜIsā al-Warrāq, Abū Huḏhayl, and Ḥafṣ al-Fard.[71] When ᶜAbd al-Gabbār (d. 1025), the famed Muᶜtazilite doctor, comes to the anti-Christian section of his *Taṯbīt dalā'il an-nubuwwah* he lists eight members of the *Muᶜtazilah* who had written refutations of Christians. Most of them are from the tenth century. But among ninth century scholars he lists al-Ǧāḥiẓ (d. 864) and Abū Ǧaᶜfar al-Iskāfī (d. 885).[72] It is not necessary here to list all of the Muslim, anti-Christian texts from the first Abbasid century that are available to us. We have said enough to make the point that the major Muslim scholars of the period were aware of the work of their contemporary Christian apologists.[73]

Recent western scholars have called attention to the basically defensive apologetic tone and character of much of the Muslim *ᶜilm al-kalām.*[74] This fact reminds us that a good deal of the "dependence" of Muslim writers on Christian sources may have been in the way of negative influence. This is to say that Muslim scholars may well have been under pressure to formulate a system of religious thought in defense of their most important doctrines, which would not be vulnerable to the attacks of the Christian polemicists.

The differences of their approach to a given issue are readily evident in the way in which Muslims and Christians address themselves to a topic. The issue of the discernment of the true religion is a case in point. We have seen that our three Christian apologists take this topic in hand by reaching back into their Neoplatonic philosophical heritage, and on this basis they elaborate a far reaching system of apologetics. From the effects of his creative activity they claim to be able to derive a knowledge of the existence of God, and of how his perfections may be described by analogy with the perfections we may discern in his creations. The identification of the creaturely perfections, of course, is determined by the Neoplatonic anthropology that informs this whole intellectual enterprise. Abū Qurrah claims to be able to discern the true religion on the basis of measuring the several religious creeds against what this philosophy teaches him to be true about God and man. While ᶜAmmār al-Baṣrī says that he cannot rely on such a comparison to teach him which of the several religions is true. Nevertheless, his list of characteristics which would disqualify the claim of any religion in which we might be able to conceive of their presence, even if it was once accepted because of evidentiary, miraculous signs, betrays the values of the same Christian, Neoplatonic anthropology that inspires Abū Qurrah and the other Christian apologists of the period.[75]

The intellectual presuppositions of the Muslim apologists are of a different order. To state it quite simply, they are not grounded in any Greek philosophical system, but in the *Qur'ān.* There is a system of thought that inspires their understanding of the *Qur'ān,*

analogous to the role of the Neoplatonic philosophical systhesis in the Christian interpretation of the Bible. It is what we would perhaps call the hermeneutics of the Arabic grammatical tradition. The influence of Arabic grammar studies on the thought patterns of the Muslim *mutakallimūn* has been examined by Richard M. Frank. A somewhat extensive quotation from his work may make the point very clear for our present purpose.

> Fittingly, for it joins central elements of the ancient Arab culture with Islam — poetry and the Koran — grammar is the first science to reach maturity in Islam — before the end of the second/eighth century — and it does so, almost completely apart from earlier and alien traditions, as a peculiarly Islamic science. This attention to language, most particularly to the language of the Koran and to the grammatical and lexical structures and the characteristics of literary Arabic, had a profound influence on the formation and development of the *kalām,* most especially in the principal Muᶜtazilite tradition of Basra and in that of the Aš̌ᶜarites, not simply in their terminology but also in the manner in which many fundamental problems of ontology and ethics — concerning, thus, God's Unity and His Justice *(at-tawḥīd wal-ᶜadl)* — were conceived, formulated and analyzed.[76]

And so we must turn first to the *Qur'ān* to discover the Muslim scholar's approach to the problem of discerning the true religion.

According to the teaching of the *Qur'ān,* God has sent "His messenger with the guidance and the religion of truth *(dīn al-ḥaqq),* that He may uplift it above every religion, though the unbelievers be averse" (*at-Tawbah* 9:33, Arberry). In context the Jews and the Christians are seen as adversaries. Muḥammad is, of course, the messenger whom God has sent. And the true religion, or religion of truth, to remain consistent in our translation of one of the *Qur'ān*'s standard phrases (cf. *al-Ḥuǧurāt* 48:28, and *aṣ-Ṣaff* 61:9), is *Islām,* or submission to the message. "The true religion with God *(ad-dīn ᶜind Allāh),*" says the *Qur'ān,* "is *Islām*" (*Āl ᶜImrān* 3:19, Arberry). This is the straight, or the right religion *(ad-dīn al-qayyim),* to borrow another standard phrase from the *Qur'ān* (cf. for example, *at-Tawbah* 9:36). And God's "conclusive argument" (*al-ḥuǧǧah al-bālighah,* cf. *al-Anᶜām* 6:149) in behalf of the right religion consists in the signs *(āyāt)* that are the verses of his speech in the *Qur'ān,* sent down in clear Arabic language. "Those who do not believe in God's signs, God will not guide them, and to them is due grievous punishment" (*an-Naḥl* 16:103 and 104). As we have seen above, and as ᶜAmmār al-Baṣrī himself records, the *Qur'ān* explicitly rejects miracles of any other sort as motives of faith. And so most Muslim scholars based their studies on a meticulous examination of the language of the *Qur'ān.* Eventually the doctrine of the *iᶜǧāz al-Qur'ān* assumed a role in Islamic apologetics that is comparable to the role of the theory of evidentiary miracles in Christian apologetics.[77]

Given this state of affairs it is not surprising that the philosophic cast of mind that characterizes the writings of the Muslim *mutakallimūn* differs so markedly in its style and its intellectual assumptions from the Neoplatonic spirit of the Christian thinkers.[78] Religiously the most striking difference seems to be the Muslim insistence that our only true knowledge of God comes from his own revealing speech in the scriptures. While the Christian remains convinced that he may come to a limited but true knowledge of God by the use of his own reasoning capacity. This knowledge then enables him to discern the true religion, he believes, and it further enables him to accept the scriptures and the teachings of the church, which carry his knowledge of God beyond what he can acquire by his own efforts. The influences that are exerted by Christians on Muslims, and *vice versa,* within the sphere of these antipodal basic assumptions, are, then, largely the negative one of avoiding formulations which may fall victim to the other side's polemics; and the positive one that encourages the creation of a satisfying, opposing system of thought. Support for this conclusion exists in the not infrequent remarks we find in the writings of the Muslim *mutakallimūn* to the effect that the formulations espoused by their own Muslim adversaries, are to be found wanting precisely because they play into the hands of the Christians. So, for example, aš-Šahrastānī claims that the teachings of Abū Huḏayl and Abū Hāšim about the divine attributes put one in mind of the divine hypostases of the Christians.[79]

Christian thinking certainly had a strong influence among Muslims when one moves away from the atmosphere of religious apologetics, into the realm of Greek philosophy and logic, as fostered by the philosophers *(al-falāsifah)* of the stamp of al-Kindī (d. 873). But this influence was exercised in a non-theological fashion, that bears no relationship to the sort of apologetics espoused by Abū Qurrah, Abū Rā'iṭah, and ᶜAmmār.

Muslim influence on the Christian apologetic writers can be seen in the numerous instances in their treatises where they employ the language of the *Qur'ān.* Clearly their intention is to invest their arguments with all of the persuasiveness that they can derive from Muslim religious sentiments, phrased in Muslim religious language. Moreover, Abū Qurrah, Abū Rā'iṭah, and ᶜAmmār are adept at taking advantage of the currency of doctrinal disputes within Islam on certain subjects to advance their own arguments in favor of Christian doctrines. This practice is nowhere more in evidence than in their discussions of the doctrine of the Trinity, utilizing the vocabulary and phraseology of the Muslim scholars' discussions about the divine attributes.

While what is described here is hopefully a fair statement of the intellectual relationship between the Muslim and the Christian religious communities during the first Abbasid century, the account should not come to a close without a brief reference to a hitherto unmentioned theological venture that failed. We have made the point that the intellectual background which Neoplatonism furnished for the Christian apologists is contrary to the set of assumptions which the study of Arabic theoretical grammar provided for the Muslim *mutakallimūn.* Because of this basic antipathy of mind sets, we have implied, the two systems of apologetics developed in different directions. But there is evidence that prior to the developments in the intellectual life of the first Abbasid century which we have been discussing, there was an attempt on the part of some Muslims to construct an Islamic apologetics on the basis of a set of essentially Neoplatonic theses. The venture failed, probably as much as for any other reason, because of the contrariety that is evident between any Neoplatonic notion about how one may come to know anything about God, by the use of reason, and the Islamic view that one comes to know about God principally through his revealed speech in the *Qur'ān.* The venture at issue is the body of thought that is associated with the name of Ǧahm ibn Safwān (d. 746). Everything that is known about his thinking comes from the writings of intellectual opponents who are busy refuting Ǧahm's presumed ideas, as these are

espoused by his alleged followers, the *Ǧahmiyyah.* Principal among the opponents of the *Ǧahmiyyah* during the first Abbasid century was the famed rigorist Muslim scholar, Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal (d. 855).[80] A study of the system of thought which is represented in the sources as that of the *Ǧahmiyyah* reveals that it can be understood as essentially Neoplatonic in its inspiration and basic assumptions.[81] What makes this point particularly significant in the present context is that it suggests that there were Muslim thinkers active during the important years of the first Abbasid century, whom their adversaries called the *Ǧahmiyyah,* who sought to construct an apologetic theology utilizing some fundamental philosophical conceptions that were common both to themselves and to the Christians. They would have been conceptually equipped to dispute with the Christians on their own terms, and to construct a system of Muslim apologetics that rejected the Christian claims. The telling point to be made here, in our discussion of the influences of the Christian apologists on the thinking of the Muslim *mutakallimūn,* and vice versa, is that the theses of the *Ǧahmiyyah* were found to be objectionable, and inconsistent with basic Islamic principles, not only by Hanbalites, but by Muʿtazilites as well. It is important to emphasize this fact because scholars who want to find Christian influences in the Muslim *kalām* often allege that this influence is particularly evident in the works of the Muʿtazilites.[82]

In the intellectual milieu that we have described, the work of the Christian apologists was an important element in the scholarly movement that was to come to fruition during the second Abbasid century in the works of thinkers both Muslim and Christian whose names are still remembered by scholars everywhere.

NOTES

[1] Cf. H.A.R. Gibb, "The Fiscal Rescript of ʿUmar II," *Arabica* 2 (1955), 2-3; M.A. Shaban, *The Abbasid Revolution* (Cambridge: University Press, 1970), p. 168.

[2] A. Mingana, "Timothy's Apology for Christianity," in *Woodbrooke Studies* 2 (1928), 1-162. Shorter Syriac rendition in A. Van Roey, "Une apologie syriaque attribuée à Élie de Nisibe," *Le Museon* 59 (1946), 381-97. For the Arabic versions, cf. Hans Putman, *L'église et l'islam sous Timothée I* (Beyrouth: Dar el-Machreq 1975): Robert Caspar, "Les versions arabes du dialogue entre le Catholicos Timothée I et le calife al-Mahdi," *Islamochristiana* 3 (1977), 107-75.

[3] A. Van Roey, *Nonnus de Nisibe; traité apologétique,* Bibliothèque du Muséon, 21 (Louvain: Bureaux du Muséon, 1948).

[4] Addai Scher, *Theodorus bar Koni Liber Scholiorum,* CSCO, 55 and 69 (Paris, Poussielgue, 1910 and 1912), LXIX, 231-84.

[5] I. Arendzen, *Theodori Abu Kurra de cultu imaginum libellus e codice arabico nunc primum editus latine versus illustratus* (Bonn: Typis Caroli Diobnig, 1877); Constantin Bacha, *Les oeuvres arabes de Théodore Aboucara évêque d'Haran* (Beyrouth: Imp. Alfawaid, 1904); idem, *Un traité des oeuvres arabes de Théodore Abou-Kurra, évêque de Haran* (Tripoli de Syrie and Rome: L'évêché grec-catholique, 1905); Georg Graf, *Die arabischen Schriften des Theodor Abu Qurra, Bischofs von Harran (ca. 740-820)* (Forschungen zur christlichen Literatur — und Dogmengeschichte, X. Band. 3/4 Heft; Paderborn: F. Schoningh, 1910); Louis Cheikho, "Mīmar li Tadurus Abī Qurrah fī Wuǧūd al-Ḫāliq wa d-Dīn al-Qawim," *al-Machriq* 15 (1912), 757-74; 825-42; Georg Graf, *Des Theodor Abu Kurra Traktat uber den Schopfer und die wahre Religion* (Beiträge zur Geschichte der Philosophie des Mittelalters. Texte und Untersuchungen, Band XIV, Heft. 1; Münster i.W.: Aschendorf, 1913); Ignace Dick, "Deux écrits inédits de Théodore Abuqurra," *Le Muséon* 72 (1959), 53-67; Sidney H. Griffith, "Some Unpublished Arabic Sayings Attributed to Theodore Abū Qurrah," *Le Muséon* 92 (1979), 29-35. For Abū Qurrah's works preserved only in Greek, cf. J.P. Migne, *Patrologiae Cursus Completus, Series Graeca* (161 vols. in 166; Paris: Brepols, 1857-1887), XCVII, cols. 1461-1610. For a recent general study on Abū Qurrah cf. Ignace Dick. "Un continuateur arabe de saint Jean Damascene: Theodore Abuqurra, évêque melkite de Harran," *Proche-Orient Chrétien* 12 (1962), 209-23, 319-32; 13 (1963), 114-29.

[6] Georg Graf, *Die Schriften des Jacobiten Ḥabīb ibn Ḫidma Abū Rā'iṭa* (CSCO, 130 and 131; Louvain: L. Durbeck, 1951).

[7] Michel Hayek, ed., *ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, Apologie et Controverses* (Beyrouth: Dar el-Machreq, 1977). Cf. the editor's French introduction to the texts, also published in *Islamochristiana* 2 (1976), 69-113.

[8] Georg Graf, "Christliche Polemik gegen den Islam," *Gelbe Hefte* 2 (1926), 825-42.

[9] Cf. Bacha, 1904, p. 28.

[10] Bayard Dodge, ed. and trans., *The Fihrist of al-Nadīm* (2 vols.; New York: Columbia University Press, 1970), I, 394.

[11] Dodge, p. 388.

[12] Cf. Cheikho, 1912, and Graf, 1913 for Abū Qurrah; Graf, 1951, CXXX, 131-159; CXXXI, 159-194 for Abū Rā'iṭah; Hayek, 50-56, 1-90 for ʿAmmār.

[13] Hayek, pp. 135-36. Reading *ad-dīn* for *allaḏhina,* ll. 19 and 20, p. 135.

[14] Cf. Cheikho, 1912, p. 837.

[15] Cheikho, p. 766.

[16] Cf. Bacha, 1905, pp. 13 and 14.

[17] Cf. A.S. Tritton, *The Caliphs and their Non-Muslim Subjects, a Critical Study of the Covenant of ʿUmar* (London: Oxford University Press, 1930); A. Fattal, *Le statut légal des non-musulmans en pays d'islam* (Beyrouth: Imprimerie Catholique, 1958).

[18] Tritton, p. 12.

[19] Cf. Rachid Haddad, "Ḥunayn ibn Isḥaq apologiste chrétien," *Arabica,* 21 (1974), p. 297.

[20] Gerhard Klinge, "Die Bedeutung der syrischen Theologen als Vermittler der grieschischen Philosophie an den Islam," *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte* 58 (1939), 375-83.

[21] Cf. Raphael J. Bidawid, *Les lettres du patriarche nestorien Timothée I,* Studi e Testi, 187 (Città del Vaticano: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 1956), p. 35.

[22] For a general discussion of these themes cf. De Lacy O'Leary, *How Greek Science Passed to the Arabs* (London: Routledge and K. Paul, 1949); Richard Walzer, *Greek Into Arabic* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1962); F.E. Peters, *Aristotle and the Arabs* (New York: New York University Press, 1968).

[23]Cf. A.C. Lloyd, "The Later Neoplatonists," in A.H. Armstrong, ed., *The Cambridge History of Later Greek and Early Medieval Philosophy* (Cambridge: University Press, 1967), pp. 272-325; I.P. Sheldon-Williams, "The Greek Christian Platonist Tradition From the Cappodocians to Maximus and Eriugena," *The Cambridge History...*, pp. 421-533. Cf. also R. Walzer, *Galen On Jews and Christians* (Oxford: University Press, 1949).

[24]Cf. Klinge, above, and my doctoral dissertation, "The Controversial Theology of Theodore Abū Qurrah, Melkite Bishop of Ḥarrān; A Historical, Comparative Study in Christian Arabic Literature," The Catholic University of America; Washington, 1978.

[25]Hayek, p. 22.

[26]Hayek, p. 26.

[27]*Ibid.*

[28]*Ibid.*

[29]Hayek, p. 27.

[30]Al-Ǧāḥiẓ, to name one Muslim polemicist, makes this charge in regard to the Christian claim that the doctrine of the Incarnation is in the scriptures. "The motive *(sabab)* for this interpretation is entirely sin, uncritical acceptance, and belief in anthropomorphism." J. Finkel, *Three Essays of Abū ᶜOthman ᶜAmr ibn Baḥr al-Jaḥiẓ (d. 869)* (Cairo: Salafyah Press, 1926, p. 25.

[31]Cf. W. Montgomery Watt, *The Formative Period of Islamic Thought* (Edinburg: University Press, 1973), p. 118.

[32]Hayek, p. 27.

[33]*Ibid.*

[34]Hayek, p. 29.

[35]Cf. Constantin Bacha, *Un traité des oeuvres arabes de Theodore Abou-Kurra, évêque de Haran* (Tripoli de Syrie and Rome: L'évêché grec-catholique, 1905). Cf. also Greek *opusculum* 21, *PG*, XCVII, cols. 1547-552.

[36]Hayek, pp. 130-35.

[37]Cf. Watt, pp. 234-35.

[38]Hayek, p. 28.

[39]Cf., for example, George F. Hourani, *Islamic Rationalism, the Ethics of ᶜAbd al-Jabbār* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), p. 70.

[40]Hayek, p. 29.

[41]*Ibid.*

[42]Hayek, p. 30.

[43]*Ibid.*

[44]There is at least one page missing in the manuscript from which Hayek has copied and edited the *Kitāb al-burhān*. The text breaks off in the course of ᶜAmmār's discussion of Judaism. It resumes in the midst of his discussion of Islam. Hayek explains (p. 31, n. 2) that a page is missing. From this information it is impossible to determine if ᶜAmmār discussed any other religion.

[45]*Ibid.*

[46]Hayek, p. 33.

[47]Hayek, pp. 136-37.

[48]Constantin Bacha, *Les oeuvres arabes de Théodore Aboucara, évêque d'Haran* (Beyrouth: Imp. Alfawaid, 1904), pp. 71-75.

[49]Georg Graf, *Die Schriften des Jacobiten Ḥabīb Ibn Ḫidma Abū Rā'iṭa,* (Louvain: L. Durbeck, 1951), CX-XX, 131-32.

[50]Louis Cheikho, *Vingt traités théologiques* (Beyrouth: Imprimerie Catholique, 1920), p. 144.

[51]Eugenio Massa, ed., *Rogeri Baconis Moralis Philosophia* (Turici: In Aedibus Thesouri Mundi, 1953), pp. 187-243.

[52]Massa, p. 189.

[53]In his *Politics* Aristotle speaks of the unlimited human desire for wealth, property, power, reputation, and so forth. Cf. Immanuelis Bekker, *Aristoteles Graece* II, (Berlin: G. Reimerum, 1831), II 1323a. Al-Fārābī's presentation of Aristotle's thought on this subject would have been available to Roger Bacon in a translation by Gerard of Cremona. Cf. Angel G. Palencia, *Al-Fārābī, Catalogo de las Ciencias* 2nd ed. (Madrid: Instituto Miguel Asin, 1953), p. 168. As Bacon says, Boethius also lists these objects of human desire in his *De Consolatione Philosophiae,* book 3. But Boethius himself mentions Epicurus, and not Aristotle, in connection with the list. Cf. Boethius, *The Consolation of Philosophy,* Richard Green, trans. (New York: Humanities Press, 1962), p. 44.

[54]Hayek, p. 31.

[55]Cf. *EI²*, *I, 40-41.*

[56]*Hayek, pp. 31 and 32.* So far I have not found this interpretation of *al-Anᶜām* 6:109 attributed to Ibn al-ᶜAbbās in any Muslim source.

[57]Cf., for example, the stories referred to in Tor Andrae, *Die Person Muhammeds in Lehre und Glauben seiner Gemeinde* (Stockholm: P.A. Norstedt, 1917).

[58]Hayek, p. 33.

[59]Hayek, p. 34.

[60]R. Paret, "Istiḥsān and Istiṣlāḥ," *EI²*, IV, 256.

[61]Hayek, p. 136.

[62]Hayek, p. 36.

[63]Hayek, p. 19.

[64]Hayek, p. 40.

[65]The phrase comes from Morris S. Seale, *Muslim Theology;. a Study of Origins with Reference to the Church Fathers* (London: Luzac, 1964), p. 74.

[66]Cf. many attributions of this sort in Harry Austryn Wolfson, *The Philosophy of the Kalam* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1976).

[67]Cf. Josef Van Ess, "The Logical Structure of Islamic Theology," ed., G.E. von Grunebaum, *Logic in Classical Islamic Culture* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1970), pp. 21-50; *idem*, "The Beginnings of Islamic Theology," ed. J. Murdoch, and E. Sylla, *The Cultural Context of Medieval Learning* (Boston: D. Reidel, 1975), pp. 89-111.

[68]Cf. the quotation from Schmölders' *Essai sur les écoles philosophiques chez les arabes* in Wolfson, p. 59.

[69]Richard MacDonough Frank, *Beings and Their Attributes; the Teaching of the Basrian School of the Muᶜtazila in the Classical Period* (Albany, N.Y.: New York University Press, 1978), p. 5.

[70]Cf. the references given in n. 10 above.

[71]Cf. Dodge, I, 417, 419, 448.

[72]Ibn Aḥmad ᶜAbd al-Gabbār al-Hamdhānī, *Taṯhbīt dalā'il an-nubuwwah* (Beirut: Dar al-ᶜArabiyyah, 1966), I, 198. Al-Gaḥiẓ' treatise is published in J. Finkel, *Three Essays of Abu ᶜOthman ᶜAmr Ibn Baḥr al-Jaḥiẓ* (Cairo: Salafyah Press, 1926). CF. the partial French trans. by I.S. Allouche in *Hespéris* 26 (1939), 123-155; and partial English trans. by Finkel in *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 47 (1927), 311-334.

[73]For the works of Muslim controversialists cf. Erdmann Fritsch, *Islam und Christentum in Mittelalter; Beiträge zur Geschichte der muslimischen Polemik gegen das Christentum in arabischer Sprache* (Breslau: Müller & Seiffert, 1930). Cf. the extensive bibliography of Robert Caspar et al., "Bibliographie du dialogue islamo-chrétien," *Islamochristiana* 1 (1975), 125-181.

[74]Cf. Louis Gardet, "Quelques réflexions sur la place du *ᶜilm al-kalām* dans les 'sciences religiuses' musulmanes," ed. George Makdisi, *Arabic and Islamic Studies in Honor of Hamilton A.R. Gibb* (Cambridge: University Press, 1965), pp. 258-69; Schlomo Pines, "A Note on an Early Meaning of the Term *Mutakallim*," *Israel Oriental Studies* 1 (1971), 224-240.

[75]The use of the term Neoplatonism here means to indicate the *mélange* of Platonic and Aristotelian doctrines that were adopted by the Christian thinkers and woven into the fabric of their theology. On this general subject cf. the survey by R. Arnou, "Platonisme des pères," *DTC* XII, 2, cols. 2258-392. Regarding anthropology, cf. the discussion in R.A. Norris, *Manhood and Christ, a Study in the Christology of Theodore of Mopsuestia* (Oxford: University Press, 1963). Cf. also the works cited in n. 23 above.

[76]Frank, p. 10.

[77]Cf. Tor Andrae, also G.E. von Grunebaum, "Iᶜdjāz," *EI*², III, 1018-20, and Richard C. Martin, "The Role of the Basrah Muᶜtazilah in Formulating the Doctrine of the Apologetic Miracle," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 39 (1980), 175-189.

[78]The classic example of a discussion illustrating the conflicting styles of thought is the debate between the Muslim *mutakallim* as-Sīrāfī, and the Christian logician Mattā ibn Yūnus. Cf. Muhsin Mahdī, "Language and Logic in Classical Islam," ed. G.E. von Grunebaum, *Logic in Islamic Culture* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1970), pp. 51-83.

[79]Aš-Šahrastānī, *Kitāb al-milal wa l-niḥal* (Cairo: al-Matbaᶜah al-Adabiyyah, 1899), I, 63. Cf. also Ibn an-Nadīm's story about Ibn Kullāb in Dodge, I, 448-49.

[80]Cf. W. Montgomery Watt, *The Formative Period of Islamic Thought* (Edinburgh: University Press, 1973), pp. 143-148.

[81]Cf. Richard M. Frank, "The Neoplatonism of Ǧahm ibn Ṣafwān," *Le Muséon* 78 (1965), 395-424.

[82]On this subject cf. A. Abel, "La polémique damascénienne et son influence sur les origines de la théologie musulmane," in *L'élaboration de l'Islam* (Paris: Presses Universitaires, 1961), pp. 61-85, and the earlier (1911) study by C.H. Becker, "Christliche Polemik und islamische Dogmenbildung," which appears in his *Islamstudien* (Hildersheim: rpt. Georg Olms, 1967), I, 432-449.

II

Ḥabīb ibn Ḫidmah Abū Rā'iṭah, a Christian *mutakallim* of the First Abbasid Century

The prophet Muḥammad died in the year 632 of the Christian era. Within two decades of his death Arab/Islamic rule had spread over Syria/Palestine, Egypt, Mesopotamia, much of Asia Minor and Persia. Many of the centers of Christian intellectual life in the late classical world are located in this geographical area. One has only to call to mind the names of such places as Alexandria, Jerusalem, Caesarea, Antioch, Edessa, Nisibis, and Gundišapor. The very mention of these cities already sets in motion in one's fancy the parade of fathers, heretics and general councils which constitutes the history of the Christian patristic era. But unfortunately, with the single notable exception of the Syro-Palestinian scholar/monk, John Damascene (d.c. 750 A.D.), hardly a name is now widely remembered in the West of a person from the Christian community of this area, who lived after the seventh century. Even among those who are conversant with Syriac Christian literature, it is fashionable to speak of an age of cultural decline beginning in the seventh century, with a final spasm of literary activity erupting in the thirteenth century, followed by silence from then until now. It is as if Christian thought had died in the East, where it had been born.

Under Arab/Islamic rule, in fact, the Christian community, which along with the Jewish community, far outnumbered the Muslim faith community in the conquered areas for many years, did not jettison its intellectual life. It adapted itself to meet the challenge proposed by Muslims. But the theological and apologetical achievements of this eastern Christian community, first in Syriac and then in Arabic, have been largely unappreciated in the West. A reason for this state of affairs has been the West's general unawareness of the religious convictions of Muslims. The fact is that at least in the beginning of Christian theology in Arabic, the parameters of the discourse were drawn by questions posed by Muslims to Christians. These questions, posed in characteristically Muslim phraseology, provoked answers from Christian scholars in terms calculated to be intelligible to Muslims. Now that our understanding of Islam and the history of its religious thought is improving in the West, it is, perhaps ironically, providing us with a key to unlock interesting chapters of Christian intellectual history.

I. THE FIRST ABBASID CENTURY

It was not in the first century of Muslim Arab rule, which corresponds roughly with the years of the Ummayad dynasty (i.e., 650-750), that Christian Arabic theology was born. These were the years when the Arabs were consolidating their power, and Muslims were in the process of establishing their distinctive patterns of faith and worship. Both Christians and Muslims thought of Islam as the religion of the conquering Arabs, which made no special appeal for conversion to the "people of the book"[1]. Meanwhile the Christian communities were just becoming aware of the fact that Islam was something more than "the heresy of the Ishmaelites", as John Damascene and many later Greek writers referred to it[2]. The several Christian communities in the Near East continued to conduct their own affairs and their own quarrels during this period, in their own languages, i.e., principally Greek, Syriac and Coptic. It was only with the Abbasid revolution (750 A.D.), and its espousal of the principle of the social equality of all Muslim believers, that conversion to Islam became an attractive option to upwardly mobile Christians[3]. This circumstance, taken together with the general growth and development of a sophisticated and cosmopolitan Arabic culture, which had been proceeding apace, set the stage for the development of Christian Arabic apologetics, and Muslim anti-Christian tracts and legislation. It gave the impetus to the growth of a distinctly Arabic ecclesiastical expression, which manifested itself in the translation into Arabic of the Bible, the texts of the liturgy, and many Christian classics. The initial steps in these enterprises were taken during the first century of the rule of the Abbasid dynasty (750-850). In particular, it was during this first Abbasid century that Christian Arabic apologetics came to its initial flowering. Patterns and procedures in apologetics were set down during this time which determined the entire subsequent development of Christian thought in Arabic. The topics of discussion were chosen. The process was initiated whereby Christian scholars stated and explained their characteristic doctrines in an Arabic phraseology modelled on that employed by contemporary Muslim *mutakallimūn*, i.e., religious dialecticians. Negatively they attempted to prove that the doctrine of the Trinity, for example, is not simply a contradiction in terms, and not a species of unbelief (*kufr*) by reason of associating others

[1] Cf. Claude Cahen, "Note sur l'accueil des chrétiens d'orient à l'islam", *Revue de l'Histoire des Religions* 166 (1964), pp. 51-58.

[2] Cf. the study of Daniel J. Sahas, *John of Damascus on Islam, the 'Heresy of the Ishmaelites'* (Leiden, 1972).

[3] Cf. M.A. Shaban, *The Abbasid Revolution* (Cambridge, 1970).

with God (*širk*). Positively they hoped to make the case that Christianity preserves accurately and fulfills completely the promises of the scriptures.

Of the dozen or so Christian controversial theologians from this period whom we know, three of them are particularly suitable for study because their works are available to us in modern editions. As it happens, they are each from one of the three major Christian confessional groups then current. Theodore Abū Qurrah was a Melkite. Ḥabīb ibn Ḥidmah Abū Rā'iṭah was a Jacobite. 'Ammār al-Baṣrī was a Nestorian. Of the three of them, Abū Rā'itah is the most suitable for an extended review of his work. Not only is a modern edition of his treatises available, but Georg Graf, their editor, has translated them all into German[4]. The works of Abū Qurrah and their French and German translations are not as readily available as are those of Abū Rā'iṭah[5]. The Arabic works of 'Ammār al-Baṣrī have only recently been published in a modern edition and they are not yet translated into a western language[6].

Before turning our attention to Abū Rā'iṭah more exclusively, it is important to call to mind the fact that contemporary with these Christian controversialists there are not only the first great Muslim jurists, traditionists, *Qur'ān* commentators and *mutakallimūm*. The first Muslim, anti-Christian writers also wrote during this first Abbasid century. Here we may mention the elderly convert from Christianity to Islam, 'Alī Rabbān aṭ-Ṭabarī[7],

[4] Georg Graf, *Die Schriften des Jacobiten Ḥabib Ibn Ḥidma Abū Rā'iṭa* (CSCO 130 and 131; Louvain, 1951).

[5] Abū Qurrah's available Greek works are in *PG*, 97, cols. 1461-1610. His Arabic works are in the following editions: I. Arendzen, *Theodori Abu Kurra de cultu imaginum libellus e codice arabico nunc primum editus latine versus illustratus* (Bonn, 1877); Constantin Bacha, *Les œuvres arabes de Théodore Aboucara, évêque d'Haran* (Beyrouth, 1904); *idem*, *Un traité des œuvres arabes de Théodore Abou-Kurra, évêque de Haran* (Tripoli de Syrie and Rome, 1905); Georg Graf, *Die arabischen Schriften des Theodor Abû Qurra, Bischofs von Ḥarrân* (ca. 740-820) (Forschungen zur Christlichen Literatur- und Dogmengeschichte, X. Band. 3/4 Heft; Paderborn, 1910); Louis Cheikho, "Mīmar li Tadurus Abī Qurrah fī Wuğūd al-Ḫāliq wa d-Dīn al-Qawīm", *al-Machriq* 15 (1912), pp. 757-774; 825-842; Georg Graf, *Des Theodor Abû Kurra Traktat über den Schöpfer und die wahre Religion* (Beiträge zur Geschichte der Philosophie des Mittelalters. Texte und Untersuchungen, Band XIV, Heft. 1; Münster i. W., 1913); Ignace Dick, "Deux écrits inédits de Théodore Abuqurra", *Le Muséon* 72 (1959), pp. 53-67; Sidney H. Griffith, "Some Unpublished Arabic Sayings Attributed to Theodore Abū Qurrah", *Le Muséon* 92 (1979), pp. 29-35.

[6] Michel Hayek (ed.), *'Ammār al-Baṣrī, Apologie et Controverses* (Beyrouth, 1977). Cf. the editor's French introduction to the texts, also published in *Islamochristiana* 2 (1976), pp. 69-113.

[7] A. Khalifé et W. Kutsch, "Ar-Radd 'ala-n-Naṣārā de 'Alī aṭ-Ṭabarī", *MUSJ* 36 (1959), pp. 115-148. A. Mingana, *The Book of Religion and Empire* (English text: Manchester, 1922; Arabic text: Cairo, 1923). Regarding the latter work cf. M. Bouyges, "Nos informations sur 'Aliy ... aṭ-Ṭabariy", *MUSJ* 28 (1949-1950), pp. 67-114.

al-Qāsim ibn Ibrāhīm, the Zaydī scholar[8], and the *littérateur* al-Ǧāḥiẓ[9]. We know of many other anti-Christian writings from Muslim scholars of this period. But the majority of their writings are not widely available today[10]. Their value for the historian of Christian thought is incomparable. Here we find not only the Muslim answers to the Christian arguments. We also find the challenges which the Christians are attempting to meet in their own works.

A. *Biography*

Only two dateable events are known from Abū Rā'iṭah's lifetime. Around the year 817, at the request of the Armenian prince Ashot Msaker (806-825), he sent the deacon Nonnus of Nisibis to the prince's court to argue in favor of the Jacobite doctrinal formulae in Christology, against the Melkite Abū Qurrah. This we know from the prefatory paragraphs to Abū Rā'iṭah's own refutation of the Melkites on the subject of the union of divinity and humanity in Christ[11]. Secondly, on the basis of a report contained in the chronicle of Michael the Syrian, we know that at a synod held in the year 828, Abū Rā'iṭah conspired with the same Nonnus mentioned above to bring about the removal of a certain Philoxenus from the office of bishop of Nisibis[12]. These notices are sufficient to enable us to conclude that Abū Rā'iṭah lived during the first half of the ninth century.

In the manuscripts, Abū Rā'iṭah is regularly called *at-Takrītī*, meaning that he was from, or at least associated with the Jacobite center at the city of Takrīt in Mesopotamia[13]. The mention of his name which occurs in the Arabic *Book of the Confession of the Fathers*, a dogmatic *florilegium* belonging to the Coptic community, calls him the bishop of Takrīt[14]. This claim that he was a bishop is not *a priori* unlikely, given his role in the synod of 828, and the fact that the Armenian prince applied to him for aid in debating with Abū Qurrah. But the thirteenth century Copt al-Mu'taman

[8] Ignazio Di Matteo, "Confutazione contro i Cristiani dello Zaydita al-Qāsim b. Ibrāhīm", *Rivista degli Studi Orientali* 9 (1921-1923), pp. 301-364.

[9] J. Finkel, *Three Essays of Abu 'Othman 'Amr Ibn al-Jaḥiz* (Cairo, 1926). Cf. the partial French trans. by I.S. Allouche in *Hespéris* 26 (1939), pp. 123-155; and partial English trans. by Finkel in *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 47 (1927), pp. 311-334.

[10] Robert Caspar et al. (eds.), "Bibliographie du Dialogue Islamo-Chrétien (VII^{e}-X^{e} s.)", *Islamochristiana* 1 (1975), pp. 125-181.

[11] Graf, CSCO, vol. 130, pp. 65-66.

[12] J.-B. Chabot, *Chronique de Michel le Syrien; Patriarche Jacobite d'Antioche* (4 vols.; Paris, 1899-1910), vol. III, pp. 50 and 65. Cf. also J.M. Fiey, *Nisibe, métropole syriaque orientale et ses suffragants des origines à nos jours* (CSCO, 388; Louvain, 1977), p. 83.

[13] Cf. J.M. Fiey, "Tagrît", *OrSyr* 8 (1963), pp. 289-341.

[14] Graf, CSCO, vol. 130, p. 160.

ibn al-'Assāl calls him bishop of Nisibis[15]. So the matter remains unresolved.

There can be no doubt that Abū Rā'itah's native language was Syriac. He belongs to that group of Christians whose theological traditions are rooted in Syriac culture, and who were among the first controversialists who attempted to translate their beliefs into Arabic. Nonnus of Nisibis also belonged to this number. In fact he was a relative of Abū Rā'iṭah. Among other works, he too wrote an apologetic treatise in Syriac in defense of Christianity, and in reply to Muslim challenges[16]. The significance of noting this fact for the purposes of our present endeavor lies in the recognition that much of what was to become standard fare in Christian Arabic thought has its roots in the Syriac intellectual tradition. Initially it was a question of expressing in Arabic what had been elaborated in Syriac[17]. However, the Arabic language was not a passive instrument in the process of translation. It became the catalyst for new thought models in Christian theology, especially in as much as Arabic was and is inextricably intertwined with an Islamic religious consciousness.

Here lies the key to understanding the fundamental reason for the birth of Christian Arabic religious literature in the first Abbasid century. By then Arabic was widely understood and freely spoken throughout the body politic. This fact, taken in conjunction with the recognition of the civil and social equality of all Muslims, that was theoretically achieved in the Abbasid revolution, explains one aspect of the new persuasiveness and attractiveness of Islam to Christians. It became essential for the Christian churches to make their doctrines as intelligible as possible in Arabic, or at least to defend themselves from charges of intellectual absurdity, in the new *lingua franca*. It was the claim of al-Ǧāḥiẓ, probably widely shared by others, that Christian doctrinal formulae, at least when expressed in Arabic, simply make no sense. Of the Christians themselves and their interpretations of the scriptures he says that their «ugly» doctrines demonstrate, «Their ignorance of the figures of speech and the inflections of languages, and the translation of one language into another, and of what it is possible [to say] about God, and what is not possible.»[18] It was necessary to reassure the Christians themselves on these points, as well as to answer the questioning Muslims.

[15] *Ibid.*, p. 162.

[16] A. Van Roey, *Nonnus de Nisibe, traité apologétique; étude, texte et traduction* (Bibliothèque du *Muséon*, vol. 21; Louvain, 1948).

[17] This was also the case with the celebrated Apology of Timothy, the Nestorian *catholicos*, who was a contemporary of Abū Rā'iṭah. Cf. Hans Putman, *L'élise et l'Islam sous Timothée I (780-823)* (Beyrouth, 1975).

[18] Finkel, *Three Essays ..., op. cit.*, p. 25.

B. *Bibliography*

There are eleven separate pieces in Georg Graf's edition of Abū Rā'iṭah's writings. They are all that is presently known of his literary output. Two of them are very short excerpts of originally longer works. They have been preserved by the Coptic community, in the work of al-Mu'taman ibn al-'Assāl, and the *Book of the Confession of the Fathers*. A third *opusculum*, preserved in at least three different manuscripts in three different places, is the report of an occasion on which Abū Rā'iṭah, a Jacobite, Abū Qurrah, a Melkite, and a certain Nestorian metropolitan named 'Abd Īšū', were brought together in the presence of an unnamed government official. Each one was ordered to relate his distinctive doctrine, in a concise statement, without any one of them making an objection to another one. Each one then states the classic Christological doctrine of his own confessional community, and offers a brief justification (*burhān*) for their characteristic formulae[19]. Scholars have been inclined to doubt the authenticity of this report. They point out that the only known Nestorian metropolitan named 'Abd Īšū' was the metropolitan of Nisibis who died in 1318. And they conclude that the report must therefore be a much later fabrication which simply makes use of the names of two earlier, well known controversialists. This conclusion, however, not only discounts two known persons in favor of an unknown one, but it ignores the fairly numerous known instances of Christians being called before Muslim government officials to give an account of themselves. But we must let this issue rest here[20]. We have eight other works of Abū Rā'iṭah to mention.

Georg Graf reckoned that four of these remaining pieces were written against the Muslims. He lists an epistle (*risālah*) on the Trinity; an epistle on the Incarnation; a list of testimonies from the Old Testament in favor of both of these doctrines; and an epistle substantiating the Christian religion. The four remaining pieces are directed against Melkites. They are an epistle addressed to an Armenian prince, against the Melkite conception of the union of divinity and humanity in Christ, as this doctrine was taught by Abū Qurrah; an epistle addressed to the same Armenian prince in defence of the Monophysite addition to the *Trishagion*[21], also against the counter

[19] Graf, CSCO, vol. 130, pp. 163-165.

[20] Consider, e.g., the Patriarch Timothy's interview with al-Mahdī, cf. n. 17 above; M.F. Nau, "Un colloque du Patriarche Jean avec l'émir des Agaréens et faits divers des années 712 à 716", *Journal Asiatique* 11th^e série, 5 (1915), pp. 225-279; K. Vollers, "Das Religionsgespräch von Jerusalem (um 800AD); aus dem Arabischen übersetzt", *ZKG* 29 (1908), pp. 29-71; 197-221.

[21] On this subject in general cf. Vincenc-S. Janeras, "Les byzantins et le trishagion christologique", in *Miscellanea Liturgica; in onore di sua eminenza il Cardinale Giacomo Lercaro* (2 vols.; Rome, 1967), vol. II, pp. 469-499.

arguments of Abū Qurrah; another short essay (*maqālah*) on the same subject; and finally a long epistle against the Melkites which is in fact a treatise on the proper understanding of the technical terms 'person', 'nature', 'being', 'hypostasis', as these are used in Trinitarian theology[22].

This bare recital of the works of Abū Rā'iṭah and their topics scarcely conveys an adequate idea of their significance. Recognizable among the four anti-Muslim treatises are examples of the two basic genres of Christian Arabic apologetic literature[23]. The one is a general apology for the Christian religion. The author of such an apology usually discusses not only the basic doctrines, such as Trinity and Incarnation, but also the criteria for recognizing the true religion. In addition, he usually attempts to answer objections to such typical Christian practices as facing east in prayer, the veneration of the cross, and the rituals of the sacraments. Among Abū Rā'iṭah's works the piece described above as a substantiation of the Christian religion is such a general apology. Each of Abū Rā'iṭah's famous contemporaries, viz., Abū Qurrah and 'Ammar al-Baṣrī, wrote similar general apologies[24]. They have the character of a *vademecum* or a compendium intended to provide the reader with ready responses to common inquiries about the Christian religion. Typically, they do not go beyond giving the gist of a suitable reply to specific questions that may be asked about the topics we have listed above.

The epistle-treatise genre is the second of the two basic categories of Christian Arabic apologetic literature. Two of Abū Rā'iṭah's anti-Muslim works have this format. It is quite clear that each piece is addressed to a much wider audience than the persons who are named in the introductory paragraphs. Often enough these adressees are completely unidentifiable. They are presented as persons who have consulted Abū Rā'iṭah, or one of the other apologists, on some doctrinal issue. The inquiries are, of course, phrased in terms that had become catchwords in the religious controversies of the time. Abū Rā'iṭah develops his responses as one who would furnish his correspondents with a whole arsenal of replies to possible distinctions, objections, and counter-proposals on any given topic. Once the initial query is proposed, in fact, he generally ignores the epistolary format altogether, and his treatise is carried forward on the momentum of its own dialectical style. At the beginning of his epistle on the Trinity, to mention only one place, he identifies this style as the question and answer method

[22] Cf. Graf's *resumé* of the contents of these works in Graf, CSCO, vol. 131, pp. iv-xxvii.

[23] Cf. Georg Graf, "Christliche Polemik gegen den Islam", *Gelbe Hefte* 2 (1926), pp. 825-842.

[24] For Abū Qurrah cf. the treatise edited by Cheikho, cited in n. 5 above. *Kitāb al-burhān* is 'Ammar al-Baṣrī's comparable work. Cf. Hayek, *op. cit.*

of inquiry. It was popular in Syriac treatises of this same nature[25]. Doubtless its ancestry is to be found in the Greek *Erotapokriseis* apologetical style[26]. The formal designations, 'question' and 'answer', have given way to a more fluid narrative technique. For this reason we have every incentive to believe that this style played a role in the development of the characteristic dialectical usage of the formal *'ilm al-kalām*, or dialectical theology, within Islam. In the days of Abū Rā'iṭah the essential features of this usage were already well established in Islamic religious texts[27].

Abū Rā'iṭah's works were written for the benefit of his fellow Jacobites, whom he calls the people of the truth (*ahl al-ḥaqq*). His principal adversaries are the Melkites and the Muslims. We should not assume that his quarrel with these two groups, especially as it was conducted in Arabic, was aimed in two different directions. In his time the apologetic enterprise of any one group (Jacobites, Melkites, Nestorians, Muslims, Jews) was necessarily conducted in view of all of the others. There was always the suspicion on the part of the Jacobites, for example, that the doctrines of Melkites and Nestorians played into the hands of Muslims, whom they considered to be professing a blend of Nestorianism and Arianism. Melkites and Nestorians, on the other hand, felt that certain Jacobite formulations such as those which mention the suffering and death of God, played into the hands of Muslim anti-Christian polemicists. Muslims, meanwhile, followed the discussions of Christian differences with interest. They commented on them and even expressed preferences among them[28]. So Abū Rā'iṭah obviously hoped that Muslims and others would understand his Jacobite position, and especially how it differed from the teachings of the Melkites, as well as its opposition to Nestorianism.

But what did Abū Rā'iṭah think of the Muslims, and how did he identify them in his writings? He never calls them Muslims. When he refers to them at all, in any way other than by repeating their religious formulae, by quoting the *Qur'ān*, or by citing their objections to Christianity, he uses such general characterizations as, «Those who differ from us» (*muḫālifūna*). Only in the first pages of his epistle on the Trinity does he use a more

[25] Cf. in particular the *scholia* of Bar Kônî. No. 10 is written in reply to Muslim questions. A Scher (ed.), *Theodorus bar Kōnī, Liber Scholiorum* (2 vols., CSCO 55 and 69; Paris, 1910 and 1912), vol. 69, pp. 231-284.

[26] Cf. Heinrich Dörries, "Erotapokriseis," in *RAC* VI (Stuttgart, 1966), cols. 342-370.

[27] Cf. Josef van Ess, "Disputationspraxis in der islamischen Theologie. Eine vorläufige Skizze", *Revue des Études Islamiques* 44 (1976), pp. 23-60.

[28] Cf., e.g., Armand Abel, *Abū 'Isā Muḥammad B. Harun al Warraq; le livre pour la réfutation des trois sectes chrétiennes, texte arabe traduit et présenté* (mimeo ed.; Bruxelles, 1949); and the catalog of Christian groups and their beliefs in *al-Kitab al-Awsaṭ* of Naši' al-Akbar, Josef van Ess (ed.), *Frühe mu'tazilitische Häresiographie* (Beirut, 1971), pp. 76-87.

definite designation. Here he calls them «southerners», or more exactly «people of the south» (*ahl at-tayman*)[29]. Initially one is inclined to emend the text to something seemingly more likely, such as «people of faith» (*ahl al-'īmān*). Muslims of Abū Rā'iṭah's time called themselves "the believers" (*al-mu'minūn*), following the preferred usage of the *Qur'ān*[30]. Abū Qurrah regularly refers to them in his treatise written against them, in favor of the veneration of images, as "people who claim faith".[31] But there is no indication of difficulties at this point in Abū Rā'iṭah's manuscript tradition. Perhaps the solution is to be found in understanding the epithet as a reference to the *qiblah*, i.e., the direction to which Muslims turn when praying, i.e., towards the *Ka'bah* in Mecca. There is some support for this suggestion in a Syriac chronicle from later times. It says that Muslims worship while facing toward the south[32]. And so "people of the south" is not a preposterous designation for Muslims who pray in Takrit, Iraq, which is located on the Tigris, some fifty kilometers northwest of Baghdad.

II. ABŪ RĀ'IṬAH'S CONTROVERSIAL THEOLOGY

A. *The Topics*

The standard topics in Muslim/Christian controversy have always included the Christian doctrines of Trinity and Incarnation. These two doctrines are in fact the two faces of the same coin as they figure in these discussions. The pivotal point is the Christian insistence that God has a consubstantial son, who became incarnate in Jesus Christ. Muslims, of course, not only deny that God generates or is generated (*al-Iḫlāṣ*, 112)[33], but they insist that Jesus the son of Mary, the Christ, is the messenger of God, his word and his spirit, who should not figure in any affirmation of three (i.e., *at-tathlīth*; cf. *an-Nisā'* (4), 171). Accordingly, Abū Rā'iṭah's treatise on the Trinity seeks to demonstrate that the affirmation of the three hypostases of the one God does not involve any contradiction to the affirmation of his unity (*at-tawḥīd*). The treatise on the incarnation seeks to explain that Jesus the son of Mary is the incarnate Son of God, without positing any change or

[29] Graf, CSCO, vol. 130, p. 1.

[30] Cf. Frederick M. Denny, "Some Religio-Communal Terms and Concepts in the *Qur'ān*", *Numen* 24 (1977), pp. 26-59.

[31] "*Man yadda'i l-īman.*" Arendzen, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

[32] I.-B. Chadot (ed.), *Anonymi Auctoris Chronicon ad Annum Christi 1234 Pertinens* (CSCO, vol. 81; Paris, 1920), p. 230.

[33] Citations from the *Qur'ān* are according to the modern Egyptian edition of the text. Translations designated as done by Arberry are from Arthur J. Arberry, *The Koran Interpreted* (2 vols.; London, 1955).

alteration in the divine being. The treatise that is a general apology for Christianity adds another basic topic to the discussion, viz., how one may discern the true religion. These three topics are the standard ones to be found in the works of all of the religious controversialists who wrote in Arabic during the first Abbasid century.

B. *The Method*

For both Muslims and Christians what is at issue in their controversies about the doctrines of Trinity and Incarnation is the proper understanding of what is said about God in the Bible. Muslims interpret the Old and New Testaments according to the principles laid down in the *Qur'ān*. In regard to the doctrines which were the topics of controversy, they customarily accused the Christians of distorting (*at-taḥrīf*) the evident meanings of the scriptural testimonies[34].

Abū Rā'iṭah, along with the other Christian apologists, is on the defensive in his treatises. He argues that the scriptures and their testimonies must be interpreted according to the dictates of reason and the doctrines of the fathers and the councils. If he puts his emphasis on reason it is because the fathers and councils were, of course, unacceptable to Muslims. And even in regard to the scriptural testimonies the arguments often come down to a discussion of the usages of language.

Abū Rā'iṭah does not hesitate to quote the *Qur'ān* in defense of his beliefs. In fact his work abounds not only with explicit quotations, but with allusions to the *Qur'ān* and many typically Qur'anic turns of phrase. This fact should alert the reader to notice his awareness of the extent to which the phraseology of the *Qur'ān* conditions the Muslim religious consciousness. It also raises, to some extent, questions about the interpretation of the *Qur'ān*. Some modern scholars have maintained that what the *Qur'ān* has to say about the Christians and their beliefs has no relationship to main-line Christianity, i.e., such groups as the Melkites, Jacobites, and Nestorians. Rather, they say that these references are to what was taught by splinter Christian groups, whose members had somehow gotten lost in the desert[35]. This is not the place to pursue this issue. But here it must be said that in the religious controversies of the first Abbasid century, the passages from the *Qur'ān* which deal with Christians were freely quoted by both sides as

[34] For a quick review of the basic issues cf. W. Montgomery Watt, "The Early Development of the Muslim Attitude to the Bible", *Transactions of the Glasgow University Oriental Society* 16 (1955-56), pp. 50-62.

[35] Cf., e.g., W. Montgomery Watt, "The Christianity Criticized in the Qur'ān", *The Muslim World* 57 (1967), pp. 197-201; Geoffrey Parrinder, *Jesus in the Qur'ān* (London, 1965).

pertinent to their discussions. They were understood by Muslims to be accurate judgments of the gist of the Christian doctrines, even though the Christian theologians may wish to question the veracity of these judgments.

As for Abū Rā'iṭah's purpose, it is to offer a proof (*al-burhān*) for the veracity of Christian doctrines, of the sort that the *Qur'ān* demands of the people of the book, "Produce your proof (*burhān*) if you speak truly" (*al-Baqarah* (2), 111 Arberry). As he says, he hopes to accomplish this purpose through conversation (*muḥāwarah*) and debate (*munāẓarah*). In his epistle on the Trinity he instructs his Christian readers to say to their Muslim interrogators, "The hope is that you will treat us fairly in the discussion (*al-kalām*) and that you will bargain with us as brothers who share in the goods they inherit from their father. All of them share in them [i.e., the goods]. Nothing belongs to one rather than to another. So we and you are on a par in the discussion."[36]

It has been said, "The distinctive character of apologetic, as compared with other ways of commending Christian faith, is the attempt to find common ground with those whom it seeks to persuade."[37] Such is clearly the distinctive character of Abū Rā'iṭah's treatises. He writes in Arabic phrases that are replete with words and expressions from the *Qur'ān*, as we have said, and further, he consciously reflects the style of the *kalām* of the Muslim *mutakallimūn*. To this extent it can be said that he was influenced by them. He consciously appropriates their idiom for the purpose of giving a new expression, or at least a new defense, to traditional Christian doctrines. We must insist on this point because of the positions of those who search the works of the earlier Christian Arabic writers for evidences of how they have influenced the Muslim writers, rather than the other way about[38]. Such an approach prevents one from observing the noteworthy achievements of the Christian apologists themselves. On the other hand, our insistence that these apologists are consciously modeling their discourse on that of the contemporary Muslim dialecticians should not be taken as a denial of the obvious influences of the church fathers on the origins of Muslim theology[39]. Nor is it incompatible with the suggestion that the refinement of the *'ilm al-kalām* owes much to the involvement of the Muslim *muta-*

[36] Graf, CSCO, vol. 130, pp. 3 and 4.

[37] Maurice Wiles, *The Christian Fathers* (London, 1966), p. 16.

[38] This approach is one of the factors that marks H. A. Wolfson's *The Philosophy of the Kalam* (Cambridge, Mass., 1976).

[39] Cf. Morris S. Seale, *Muslim Theology; A Study of Origins with Reference to the Church Fathers* (London, 1964).

kallimūn in arguments with non-Muslim controversialists, including Christians[40].

C. *The Arguments*

The most convenient way to sketch Abū Rā'iṭah's arguments against the Muslims is to follow the outline of his general apology for Christianity, supplementing it in the proper places by reference to his epistles on the Trinity and the Incarnation.

The epistle on the substantiation of the Christian religion is unfinished in the form in which we have it[41]. Yet it has four major sections. The first of these discusses the marks of the true religion. The second is an argument in defense of the Trinity, from reason and the scriptures. The third seeks to justify the doctrine of the Incarnation. The fourth and unfinished section deals with several areas of Christian life and practice about which Muslims have questions, viz., the veneration of the cross, the Eucharist, the forty day fast.

1. The True Religion

Abū Rā'iṭah argues that the only defensible reason for the profession of any religious doctrine is evidence of God's own endorsement of that doctrine. Such an evidence, he maintains, is to be found in the miracles worked with God's permission by the messengers who preach the doctrine. He recalls that this is the precedent set in scripture. God enabled Moses to work certain miracles in confirmation of his claim to be God's messenger (cf. Exodus 4:1-8). The same story about Moses is to be found in the *Qur'ān*, e.g., in *Ṭa Ha* (20), 18-23. On this model, he argues, Christianity alone of the contemporary religions has a just claim to allegiance. The miracles worked by the prophets who foretold Christ, and those worked by Jesus himself, and by the apostles with the permission of Jesus, prove God's endorsement of Christianity[42]. The reason for reliance on miracles as an evidence of God's endorsement, according to Abū Rā'iṭah, is that they are a matter of historical record. As such they are clearer proof of divine approval than anything rhetorical fancy can devise. They are evident to the simple minded person as well as to the wise man. "There is no way to deny or disown [the

[40] Cf. L. Gardet, "Quelques réflexions sur la place du *'ilm al-kalām* dans les 'sciences religieuses' musulmanes", in George Makdisi, (ed.), *Arabic and Islamic Studies in Honor of Hamilton A. R. Gibb* (Cambridge, Mass.; 1965), pp. 258-259; S. Pines, "A Note on an Early Meaning of the Term *Mutakallim*," *Israel Oriental Studies* 1 (1971), pp. 224-240.

[41] Graf, CSCO, vol. 130, pp. 131-159.

[42] *Ibid.*, p. 136.

miracles] in the heart," he says, "and if the tongue denies them it is because of envy or an antecedent hatred."[43] For this reason Abū Rā'iṭah takes it as axiomatic that miracles are the basic warranty for the acceptance of Christian doctrines. As he puts it,

> The clearest evidence and the plainest proof in evidence of what we say, and the correctness of our manner of speech, which we have spoken on the authority of the *imāms* of Christianity, and taken from the Old and New divine scriptures, whose claim is authenticated, consists in the signs and wonders we have described, rather than opinion or reasoning[44].

Such a reliance on the miracles of Christ and his disciples as a basic motive for accepting the credibility of Christian teaching is certainly not an original argument on the part of Abū Rā'iṭah. It is at least as old as the work of the earliest extra-biblical apologist of whom we have a record, viz. Quadratus, who wrote in the early second century[45]. Abū Rā'iṭah, however, is following a method of presenting traditional Christian apologetic arguments in the idiom of the *Qur'ān*. This method is already evident in his referral to the miracles of Moses which are described in the *Qur'ān*; in his use of Arabic terms such as "*imām*" in the quotation given above; and in his description of miracles as "signs" (*ayyāt*) that are wrought by the leave, or the permission of God (*idhn Allāh*). His use of the latter phrase is particularly significant. The *Qur'ān* insists that the miracles worked by all of God's messengers, including those of Jesus, son of Mary, were performed only by the permission of God (cf., e.g., *Āl 'Imrān* (3), 49). Whereas Abū Rā'iṭah insists that it is a matter of record that Jesus worked miracles in his own name, and that his apostles and disciples worked them by Jesus' permission (*bi 'idhnihi*).

There is another important element in Abū Rā'iṭah's discussion of how one may discern the true religion. He has argued that the miracles worked by the prophets, by Jesus, and by the apostles and disciples are an evidence of God's endorsement of Christianity. He maintains that this endorsement is the only worthy motivation for sustaining a firm religious conviction (*i'tiqād*). By way of contrast, he lists six other motives or incentives which he considers to be unworthy reasons for professing any religious creed. They are worldly desire, ambition, overpowering fear, license, personal aggrandizement, and tribal solidarity. He quickly points out that no one should profess Christianity for any one or all of these reasons. He leaves it unsaid, but his

[43] *Ibid.*

[44] *Ibid.*, pp. 140-141.

[45] Cf. G. W. H. Lampe, "Miracles and Early Christian Apologetic", and M. F. Wiles, "Miracles in the Early Church", in C. F. D. Moule (ed.), *Miracles* (London, 1965), pp. 203-234.

implication is clearly that these six motives do play a part in the religious convictions of those who adhere to non-Christian religions. In his own milieu these other religions are principally Judaism and Islam.

Abū Rā'iṭah's list of the unworthy reasons for sustaining religious conviction calls attention to the fact that his contemporaries, Abū Qurrah and 'Ammār al-Baṣrī, outline similar reasons for which a religion should not be accepted[46]. Like Abū Rā'iṭah, they too are silent about what religions they think are professed for these unworthy reasons. But the later Christian Arabic apologist who is known under the pseudonym 'Abd al-Masīḥ ibn Isḥaq al-Kindī, who uses the same argument, did not hesitate to allege that most converts to Islam were motivated by these same unworthy incentives[47]. The only other place were such an argument is to be found in Christian apologetics is in Roger Bacon's *Moralis Philosophia.* He lists almost the same six unworthy incentives as does Abū Rā'iṭah. Since a Latin translation of al-Kindī's apology for Christianity was available in the West from the time of Peter the Venerable[48], one wonders if it was Bacon's source for this sort of argument. He himself mentions only Aristotle and Boethius.

Since the Christians were arguing already in the first Abbasid century that the miracles worked by Jesus, and by subsequent Christian holy men with the permission of Jesus, prove God's endorsement of Christian teaching, it is not surprising to discover that Muslim apologists began to respond in the same vein, in defense of Muḥammad's claim to prophecy and Islam's claim to universal allegiance. For example, stories which are typically told about Christian holy men are now seen to have counterparts even in Ibn Isḥaq's eighth century biography of the prophet[49]. So the influence of Christian apologists such as Abū Rā'iṭah can be understood as having an effect even in the development of Muslim apologetics.

[46] Cf. Hayek, *op. cit.*, pp. 31-41; 136-138; Bacha, 1904, pp. 71-75; Van Roey, *op. cit.*, pp. 29-32; 64-67.

[47] Cf. the English summary of this apology in William Muir, *The Apology of Al Kindy, Written at the Court of al-Mamun, in defense of Christianity* (London, 1887).

[48] Cf. James Kritzeck, *Peter the Venerable and Islam* (Princeton, 1964), pp. 101-107; José Muñoz Sendino, "Apologia del Cristianismo de Al-Kindi", *Miscelanea Comillas* 11 and 12 (1949), pp. 339-460. Cf. Eugenio Massa (ed.), *Rogeri Baconis Moralis Philosophia* (Turin, 1958), pp. 188-192.

[49] Cf., e.g., Gordon D. Newby, "An Example of Coptic Literary Influence on Ibn Ishaq's Sirah", *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 31 (1972), pp. 22-28. One should point out that the themes to be found in the relevant hagiographic literature are not limited to Coptic. Cf. Peter Brown, "The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity", *Journal of Roman Studies* 61 (1971), pp. 80-101; *idem.*, "Town, Village and Holy Man: the Case of Syria", in *Assimilation et résistance à la culture gréco-romaine dans le monde ancien: Travaux du VI^e Congrès international d'études classiques [Madrid, 1974]* (Paris/Bucharest, 1976), pp. 213-220.

2. The Trinity

It should be stated at the outset of our discussion of the Trinity that for Abū Rā'iṭah this doctrine is a datum of the scriptures. His purpose is not to prove its truth, but to explain the formula that expresses it. In the comparatively small space he devotes exclusively to the Bible in his apologies for the Trinity, he contents himself with listing the traditional scriptural testimonies[50]. The testimonies, and their accompanying interpretations had become traditional over the centuries of Christian, anti-Jewish apologetic and polemic writing. The purpose there had been to prove from scripture that Christians are not tritheists, and that Jesus Christ is the Word of God, the second person of the Trinity become incarnate[51]. No change appears in the basic thrust of these arguments when the Muslims join the Jews as the adversaries. But there is a new objection to face, as we mentioned above.

The *Qur'ān* says that the people of the book distort and misconstrue (*at-taḥrīf*) the testimonies of the scriptures. Abū Rā'iṭah deals with this objection in his epistle on the Trinity. He maintains that the charge might be granted some credence if it were not for the fact that the Jews, who are inimical to Christians, have the same Old Testament scriptures as the Christians have. If the response to this claim is that the Jews have allowed the distortion of the scriptures at the hands of Christians for the sake of misleading the Muslims, Abū Rā'iṭah retorts that such a supposition would involve the self-defeat of the Jews[52]. This defense involves only the Old Testament to be sure. But, especially in regard to the Trinity, it is the Old Testament that is the major source of the scriptural testimonies that he mentions.

The major objection that Muslims of Abū Rā'iṭah's time raised to the doctrine of the Trinity did not focus on the scriptures. Rather they objected to what they perceived as a contradiction in the terms of the doctrine itself, i.e., the statement that there is one God in three hypostases. They viewed this doctrine as a threat to monotheism. The simple fact is, they argued, that positing three (*at-tathlīth*) divine hypostases is directly contradictory to the profession of monotheism (*at-tawḥīd*). Certain Muslims who were adept in Greek philosophy, such as Abū Yūsuf Ya'qūb ibn Isḥaq al-Kindī (d. 873), a near contemporary of Abū Rā'iṭah, even argued that the doctrine is untenable on the grounds of Greek logic[53].

[50] Graf, CSCO, vol. 130, pp. 19-23, 94-106, 146-147.

[51] Cf. the study of these scriptural testimonies in A.P. Hayman, *The Disputation of Sergius the Stylite Against a Jew* (CSCO, vol. 339, Louvain, 1973), pp. 9-32.

[52] Graf, CSCO, vol. 130, pp. 23 and 24.

[53] Cf. al-Kindi's objections as repeated in A. Perier, "Un traité de Yahyâ ben 'Adî, défense du dogme de la trinité contre les objections d'al-Kindi", *ROC* 22 (1920-1921), pp. 3-21.

Abū Rā'iṭah's defense of the doctrine has two main emphases. They are, first, what is meant by saying that God is one. And, second, what is meant by 'describing' (*waṣf*) God in terms of hypostases that are named 'father', 'son', and 'spirit'. A larger and more basic concern is the whole notion of describing God or ascribing predicates to him. We must turn our attention briefly to this larger subject prior to following Abū Rā'iṭah's more specific arguments.

The description (*waṣf*) of God and the proper understanding of any predicate (*ṣifah*) applied to him in divine revelation was the subject of a major religious controversy among Muslims in Abū Rā'iṭah's day. It was the existence of the Muslim controversy on this subject that supplied the 'common ground' and much of the terminology for Abū Rā'iṭah's defense of the Christian doctrinal formulae. The controversy centered on the divine attributes (*ṣifāt Allāh*) and how one may affirm their reality without compromising one's affirmation of God's unity[54].

Without here undertaking a review of the Muslim controversies about the divine attributes, we must nevertheless pause for a moment to say something about the Arabic verb *waṣafa* and its associated forms. Word for word, this verb in its various grammatical manifestations occurs more often in Abū Rā'iṭah's treatises than any other single locution. It basically means 'to describe' something. The *maṣdar* or verbal noun of the same root, i.e., *waṣf*, means 'description' or the act of describing. The noun *ṣifah* indicates first of all a descriptive term, i.e., an adjective. Then it can be considered as a predicate which affirms some given meaning (*al-ma'nā*) to be true of a given subject entity. In this functional sense the *ṣifah* as predicate is equivalent of a relative clause. 'God is knowing (*'ālim*)' for example, is a proposition in which the *ṣifah*, or predicate, 'knowing', says that God is one who knows. It is a name or a noun in as much as it says that God is a knower. This understanding of *ṣifah* as a descriptive predicate had already been elaborated by the Arabic grammarians in the eighth century[55]. As we shall see, Abū Rā'iṭah was well aware of the implications of this understanding.

It is not the verb *waṣafa* or its associated forms as such, however, which evoke the immediate context for Abū Rā'iṭah's apologetic arguments. Rather, as we said above, it is when God is the subject of description, and when predicates (*ṣifāt*) are spoken of him, and the Muslim scholars are discussing the meanings and the implications of these predicates, in the light

[54] Cf. Michel Allard, *Le problème des attributs divins* (Beyrouth, 1965); Richard Frank, *Beings and their Attributes* (Albany, N.Y., 1978).

[55] Cf. W. Diem, "Nomen, Substantiv und Adjektiv bei den arabischen Grammatikern", *Oriens* 23-24 (1974), pp. 313-316.

of the developing Arabic grammatical understanding, that the proper intellectual context is found for Abū Rā'iṭah's apology for the Trinitarian doctrinal formula. The discussion within Islam centered around certain ones of the beautiful names of God (*al-'asmā' al-ḥusnā*)[56] which are common in the *Qur'ān*, e.g., 'knowing' (*'ālim*), 'powerful' (*qādir*), 'hearing' (*samī'*), 'seeing' (*baṣīr*), etc. All Muslims agree that the propositions to be found in the book of revelation, in which God is the subject and one of these *ṣifāt*, or adjectives, is the predicate, are true. In Abū Rā'iṭah's time, and for more than a century thereafter, there was a considerable controversy over what the truth of such propositions implies, and how they are to be understood, in the light of the suppositions of Arabic grammar. The grammarians of that day thought, to quote Richard Frank, "The inflected forms of the verb and the verbal adjectives ... are derived from nouns, viz., from the *maṣādir* [i.e., verbal nouns], which, as nouns are (or may be) understood to name or designate entities of some kind."[57] If one were to hold that the predicates ascribed to God must be understood in a strict sense, and not metaphorically, then in the light of this grammatical supposition, some explanation must be forthcoming as to how it is possible to affirm the truth of such propositions as we have mentioned, without compromising one's affirmation of God's unity (*at-tawḥīd*). After all, one could hardly maintain on Islamic premises that there are distinct entities in God, as the use of the usual descriptive predicates is now seen to imply in Arabic. This issue was the focus of the Muslim controversy. Abū Rā'iṭah did not enter into it as such, but he was certainly conversant with its idiom, as we shall see.

The Christian apologists, and Abū Rā'iṭah among them, were quick to see that the prominence of such a controversy provided them with a context, and even with a phraseology, in which they could argue in behalf of their traditional doctrine of the Trinity. The fact that in Arabic grammar the *ṣifāt* imply nouns (*maṣādir*), and the fact that nouns name entities, prompted the Christian apologists to draw comparisons between *ṣifāt* and hypostases. Eventually, as it happened, in the work of Yaḥya Ibn 'Adī (893-974), Abū Rā'iṭah's Jacobite successor in apologetics, it was even affirmed, amid the proper definitions and distinctions to be sure, that, "God is one being (*ǧawhar*), of three predicates (*ṣifāt*), each one of which is other than the

[56] Cf. this term used in *Ṭa Ha* (20), 8; *al-Isrā'* (17), 110.

[57] Richard Frank, in an untitled paper prepared for the Society for the Study of Islamic Philosophy, and presented at their meeting on March 30, 1976, private typescript, p. 4.

other two in meaning (*al-ma'nā*)."[58] It is no surprise, in response to this state of affairs, to find later Muslim scholars accusing their own earlier Muslim adversaries of having advocated positions regarding the *ṣifāt Allāh* which in effect put these *ṣifāt* on the same plane of significance as the Christians' divine hypostases. Such was aš-Šahrastānī's (d. 1153) judgment on the position regarding God's attributes advocated by Abū l-Hudhayl al-'Allāf (d. 841), Abū Rā'iṭah's famous Mu'tazilite contemporary. He said, "Abū l-Hudhayl's affirmation of these attributes as aspects of the essence is the same as the hypostases of the Christians."[59] And from the bibliographer Ibn an-Nadīm (d. 995) we have an alleged report from the ninth century Nestorian scholar Pethion about 'Abd Allāh Ibn Kullāb (d. 855), another Mu'tazilite. He supposedly summed up his position regarding the speech (*kalām*) of God with the saying, "The word of Allāh is Allāh." For this reason his fellow Mu'tazilite, 'Abbād, called him a Christian. Pethion is quoted as saying, "God be merciful to 'Abd Allāh. While he was sitting beside me in this cloister, he pointed in the direction of the church and learned this saying from me. If he had lived we would have overcome the Muslims."[60] The influence of the Christian apologists who took advantage of the Muslim discussions for their own purposes clearly had an effect. But our business is with Abū Rā'iṭah's arguments.

a. God is One

Abū Rā'iṭah opens his treatise on the Trinity with the insistence that the Muslims should not assume that they and the Christians are operating with the same concept of unity (*waḥdānīyah*), when they both say that God is one (*wāḥid*). The Muslims, on Abū Rā'iṭah's report, argued that since both Christians and Muslims agree that God is one, this affirmation should of itself rule out the possibility of any affirmation of three divine hypostases. Abū Rā'iṭah is probably thinking here of the statement in the *Qur'ān*, instructing the Muslims about their relationship with the people of the book. Say, "We believe in what has been sent down to us, and what has been sent down to you; our God and your God is one." (*al-'Ankabūt* (29), 46). In response to this claim Abū Rā'iṭah asks, "In how many ways can

[58] Augustin Perier, *Petits traités apologétique de Yahya ben 'Adi* (Paris, 1920), p. 11. On this subject, look for the publication of Avril Makhlouf, "The Trinitarian Doctrine of Yaḥya Ibn 'Adī."

[59] Translation of W. Montgomery Watt, *The Formative Period of Islamic Thought* (Edinburgh, 1973), p. 246.

[60] Bayard Dodge, (ed. and trans.), *The Fihrist of al-Nadīm; a Tenth Century Survey of Muslim Culture* (2 vols.; New York, 1970), vol. I, p. 448.

something be said to be one?" The immediate answer is that in general something may be called 'one' in genus, or 'one' in species, or 'one' in number. But none of these may apply to God, he says, and particularly not the last one. That is to say, he argues that God may not be said to be one in number, which, he suspects, is his Muslim adversary's position[61]. He proceeds to build his own argument against this Muslim position on the basis of another assertion about God to be found in the *Qur'ān*, viz., "Like him there is aught" (*aš-Šūrā* (42), 11). This verse, he says, contradicts the claim that God is one in number. This particular verse from the *Qur'ān* was also widely quoted by Abū Rā'iṭah's contemporary Muslim *mutakallimūn*, especially the Mu'tazilites, and specifically in connection with the adjective 'one' (*wāḥid*), as it is predicated of God[62]. So Abū Rā'iṭah's purposes are clearly to subvert the Muslim position. His argument is easy to follow, if not easy to accept. First he explains what he means by maintaining that God cannot be one in number. Then he argues that God must be one in being or substance, if it is true that there is nothing like him. And finally, basing himself on what amounts to a numerology, he argues that the numeral 'three' is the only numeral that is unlike any other numeral, and therefore it is fitting that it be applied to God, "Like whom there is aught," and who is one in being, but three in hypostases.

i. *Not One in Number*. Muslim scholars argued that to say that God is one (*wāḥid*) in number is to maintain that he is a unique one (*wāḥid fard*). This is the terminology employed by the Basrian Mu'tazilite Abū 'Alī al-Ǧubbā'ī (d. 915)[63]. We have every reason to believe Abū Rā'iṭah's report that his own Muslim contemporaries employed the same terminology. Abū Rā'iṭah argues that this position is impossible to maintain if we are to take the testimony of the *Qur'ān* seriously, viz., "Like him there is aught." His argument is that the number 'one' is a digit. It is merely the first digit of a series of digits. The first digit anticipates the series. It is a part (*ba'ḍ*) of the series. To say, that God is one in number is to describe him in terms of division (*tab'īḍ*) and diminution (*nuqṣān*). Furthermore, it is to accept a description (*ṣifah*) of him which fails to distinguish him from the rest of his creation. He is merely a part of a series. The fact is, he

[61] It is in fact the position espoused by the philosopher al-Kindī. Cf. A. Perier, *art. cit.*, p. 11.

[62] Cf. H. Ritter (ed.), *Die dogmatischen Lehren der Anhänger des Islam von Abu l-Ḥasan 'Alī ibn Ismā'īl al-As'arī* (Istanbul, 1929), p. 155.

[63] Cf. the report in al-Ḥasan 'Abd al-Ǧabbār, *Al-Mughnī* (15 vols; Cairo, 1960), vol. V, p. 245.

concludes, "The perfection of number is what comprises all species of number, whereas 'one' is a part of number."[64]

ii. *One in Being*. Abū Rā'iṭah contends that the Christian description of God as 'one' means that he is one in being (*ǧawhar*). He uses the Arabic word *ǧawhar* where we should find οὐσία in Greek, or *ithyâ* in Syriac. In English, following the custom of the Latin theologians, we often find the word 'substance' used in such a context. Abū Rā'iṭah's use of the word *ǧawhar* here is noteworthy because it contrasts with the general meaning of the term as it is used in the writings of the contemporary Muslim *mutakallimūn*. In their system of thought *ǧawhar* indicates something on the order of an 'atom' which is thought of as a constructive element or principle in the ontological structure of composite, created beings. It presumes an entirely different metaphysics than what one finds in Christian contexts[65]. This Muslim usage has nothing to do with what Abū Rā'iṭah is saying about God. As a matter of fact the Mu'tazilite *mutakallimūn* agreed that God is not a *ǧawhar*[66]. In his affirmation that God is 'perfect one' (*wāḥid kāmil*) in 'being' (*ǧawhar*) Abū Rā'iṭah means, as he clarifies it, that God's 'whatness' (*al-māhiyyah*)[67] is indivisible. He is simple (*baṣīt*), non-composite, spiritual (*rūḥānī*), non-bodily. He transcends all of his creatures, both sensible and intelligible. Nothing resembles him, and nothing other than himself is intermingled with him. He is unique in 'being'.[68]

When Christians say that God is three, Abū Rā'iṭah next points out, they are not speaking of his 'being' (*ǧawhar*). Rather, they are speaking of three divine hypostases, i.e., 'individuals' or 'persons' (*ašḫāṣ*). He uses the latter term to explain the meaning of the term *uqnūm* (pl. *aqānīm*), which is an Arabic transliteration of the Syriac word *q*ᵉ*nômâ*. This is the word that does duty for the Greek term 'hypostasis'. He will explain what these terms mean further along in his treatise. At the present juncture he intends only to show what Christians mean when they say God is one. "We describe him as perfect one (*wāḥid kāmil*) in being (*ǧawhar*), not in number, because in number, i.e., in hypostases, he is three."[69]

iii. *'Three' the Perfect Number*. The number 'three' expresses the perfection of number, Abū Rā'iṭah argues, because it comprises each species of number,

[64] Graf, CSCO, vol. 130, p. 6.
[65] Cf. Richard M. Frank, *The Metaphysics of Created Being According to Abû l-Hudhayl al-'Allâf, a Philosophical Study of the Earliest Kalam* (Istanbul, 1966), pp. 39-41, esp. p. 39, n. 5.
[66] Cf. Ritter, *op. cit.*, p. 155.
[67] For the terminological parallelism, *ǧawhar//māhiyyah*, cf. Graf, CSCO, vol. 130, p. 145.
[68] *Ibid.*, pp. 7 and 8.
[69] *Ibid.*, p. 7.

both odd and even. He mentions this point very briefly, as if he could rely on the reader's immediate understanding. But we must turn to his nephew, the deacon Nonnus of Nisibis, to appreciate what he is saying. Nonnus spells it out in his Syriac apology for Christianity.

> One is an odd number, but two is an even number. While three is even and odd at the same time, one even [digit], and one odd [digit]. Every number above three, either does not preserve this completeness of the species of numbers (e.g., four is two even numbers, and there is no odd number; while five, even though it includes an odd number, also has two even numbers.) Or, if they somewhere preserve the appearance [i.e., of the completeness of number], they are doubled, and they proceed to an infinite magnitude without cause[70].

Abū Rā'iṭah's conclusion is that the Christian description (*waṣf*) of God as one, and the Muslim description of God as one are not the same things at all. Therefore, he is arguing, *at-tawḥīd* does not necessarily exclude *at-tathlīth*, as the Muslims may think. Rather, he maintains, God is one in being, and his three hypostases express the fullness and perfection of the species of number[71].

b. God is Three Hypostases

As we mentioned above, Abū Rā'iṭah believes that the doctrine of the Trinity is a datum of the scriptures. In his treatises he cites the standard testimonies. He includes texts from the Old Testament in which God speaks in the first person plural. For good measure he also provides a list of six verbs in the first person plural which occur in God's speech as it is recorded in the *Qur'ān*[72]. Beyond this much however his task is to explain that the doctrine is reasonable, that it involves no contradiction, and that there are analogies to be found among created things where the numbers one and three may both be used to describe the same thing from different perspectives, without mutual exclusivity. Here we may review the main features of his arguments. They will be sufficient to enable us to observe his methodology, and to see his attempt to walk on at least some terminological common ground with his Muslim contemporaries.

i. *Description*. Abū Rā'iṭah establishes a common ground with the Muslim *mutakallimūn* at the outset of his discussion. He uses the same device he employed at the beginning of his section on the meaning of the statement that God is one. He has his imaginary Muslim interlocutor claim that the

[70] Van Roey, *op. cit.*, pp. 7* and 8*.
[71] The philosopher al-Kindi argued that this notion is absurd. Cf. A. Perier, *art. cit.*, pp. 11 and 12.
[72] Graf, CSCO, vol. 130, pp. 20-21.

Christians testify to the truth since they do not hesitate to describe God as living (*ḥayy*), knowing (*ʿālim*), hearing (*samīʿ*), and seeing (*baṣīr*)[73]. These four adjectives appear frequently in the *Qurʾān* as epithets of God. They also figured prominently in the current Muslim debates about the *ṣifāt Allāh*.

Abū Rāʾiṭah loses no time in pointing out that these adjectives are not univocal names, but relative names (*asmāʾ muḍāfah*). That is to say, they do not designate a definite object. Rather, they bespeak a relationship of one thing to another. In the present instance, for example, each one of these four adjectives, which are commonly predicated of God, bespeak a corresponding act or fact in the subject of which they are predicated. As Abū Rāʾiṭah himself puts it, choosing one of them as an example, "The knower is knowing by means of an act of knowledge, and the act of knowledge is an act of knowledge of a knower."[74] We should have no trouble in recognizing in this statement the positioning of the question which so bothered the Muslim *mutakallimūn*. What is the ontological status of an act of knowing (*ʿilm*) as it is affirmed of God, who is the subject (*mawṣūf*) of the predicate (*ṣifah*) 'knowing' (*ʿālim*)? Does it pertain to his being (*ǧawhar*) in its eternity?

A distinction must be made at this juncture, Abū Rāʾiṭah reminds his readers, between a predicate which can be said to be a natural predicate (*ṣifah ṭibāʿiyyah*), and by which, in the nature of the case, God must be eternally described; and a predicate of action (*fiʿl*). In the latter instance, Abū Rāʾiṭah explains, one is speaking of a predicate which God has acquired by an act of acquisition (*iktisāb*). For example, he is described as a creator (*ḫāliq*) only subsequently to his act of creation (*ḫalq*). He cannot be described as eternally creating, or, for that matter, as eternally bringing about the resurrection, enlivening the dead, rewarding the just or punishing in hell those who deserve it, to mention just a few of the actions ascribed to him in the *Qurʾān*. But God cannot even for an instant be said to be devoid of life or knowledge. They are eternal facts of his nature.

Again we quickly recognize in this distinction of predicates the distinction made by Muslim *mutakallimūn* between the so-called "attributes of the essence" (*ṣifāt adh-dhāt*) and "attributes of action" (*ṣifāt al-fiʿl*)[75]. The distinction was also familiar to other Christian apologists, in a slightly different form, e.g., in Nonnus of Nisibis' general apology[76]. It is a common ground between Abū Rāʾiṭah and the Muslims.

[73] *Ibid.*, pp. 7-9.

[74] *Ibid.*, p. 8.

[75] Cf. R. M. Frank, "The Divine Attributions According to the Teaching of Abū l-Huḏayl al-ʿAllāf", *Le Muséon* 82 (1969), pp. 451-506.

[76] Cf. Van Roey, *op. cit.*, pp. 7*-9*.

So it must follow, Abū Rāʾiṭah proceeds to argue, that life (*ḥayah*) and knowledge (*ʿilm*), for example, are eternal in God if he is truly to be described as living (*ḥayy*) *and knowing* (*ʿālim*). His life and knowledge must be said to be 'of' him or 'from' him (*minhu*) in some way. The only other alternative, he argues, is to say that are entities other than him altogether, and then they would be related to him as partner to partner (*aš-šarīk ilā š-šarīk*). This option Abū Rāʾiṭah takes to be obviously inadmissible. And here again one immediately recalls the *Qurʾān*'s statement that God has no partner, "*lā šarīk lahu*" (e.g., in *al-ʾAnʿām* (6), 163).

Since life and knowledge must be 'of' or 'from' God in some natural way, Abū Rāʾiṭah's argument continues, and since they must pertain to his very being (*ǧawhar*), and cannot be products of his action, as already explained, they must somehow be perfect entities 'of' or 'from' a perfect entity (*kāmilah min kāmilin*). The only other option is that they be parts of a perfect being (*abʿāḍ min kāmilin*). But this conclusion is clearly inadmissible since no parts can be allowed in the description of God. Furthermore, as perfect entities, God's life and knowledge must be considered not only as distinguishable, but also as simultaneously in union (*ittiṣāl*) with one another and with his perfect being.

I suppose it is already clear that Abū Rāʾiṭah will argue that God's life and knowledge may be considered to be hypostases of his one divine being (*ǧawhar*). With this suggestion he hopes to fulfill all of the logical requirements he has mentioned, and to avoid the pitfalls to which he has alluded. But if the introduction of the Christian notion of divine hypostases is to be defended as a way out of the dilemma facing the Muslim *mutakallimūn*, Abū Rāʾiṭah must explain what a hypostasis is, and how a whole host of other objections may be met. Here we shall sketch the highlights of his argument, explaining those essential aspects of it that he himself repeats in the *précis* of it contained in his general apology for Christianity[77]. It should be clear from the outset, however, that this whole effort on Abū Rāʾiṭah's part, amounts to an attempt to explain some very complicated Greek theologico-philosophical elaborations in an Arabic idiom designed to express a very different set of metaphysical principles. Abū Rāʾiṭah consciously appropriates the terminology of the Muslim scholars. However, the fact remains that it is an idiom that is foreign to his own system of thought. One is reminded of the difficulties encountered by the philosophers who attempted to incorporate Greek ideas of logic into Arabic intellectual life[78]. But this is another story.

[77] Graf, CSCO, vol. 130, pp. 140-148.

[78] Cf. the account of the debate between the *mutakallim* as-Sīrāfī and the Christian logician Mattā ibn Yūnus, in *Muhsin Mahdi*, "Language and Logic in Classical Islam", in G. E. von Grunebaum (ed.), *Logic in Classical Islamic Culture* (Wiesbaden, 1970), pp. 51-83.

For Abū Rā'iṭah the divine hypostases (*aqānīm*) are the being (*ǧawhar*) of God. He argues this point at a considerable length in his treatise against the Melkites[79]. The conceptual difference between the two terms, *uqnūm* and *ǧawhar*, as he explains it in his treatise on the Trinity, is like the difference between a universal entity (*šay' 'āmm*) and the particularities (*ḫawāṣṣ*) which it comprehends. That is to say, as Abu Ra'iṭah interprets it, the term *uqnūm* designates particular individuals. So it differs from *ǧawhar* only in regard to the numerousness of its comprehension (*kathrat ḍammihi*)[80]. It introduces the notion of numerousness. In other words, the individuals (*ašḫāṣ*) which comprise a universal entity, which can be counted, are the *aqānīm* or hypostases of that entity, according to him. For example, the being, or the substance, of all men is one. But there are many human individuals. "Regarding the name (*ism*) of a single hypostasis (*uqnūm*)," Abū Rā'iṭah says, "it is like 'Abd Allāh, Mōses, Aaron, and other such names."[81] It is for this reason that he chooses the Arabic word *šaḫṣ*, 'individual', to render the transliterated Syriac word *uqnūm*, which in turn translates the Greek word ὑπόστασις. Not all of Abū Rā'iṭah's Christian contemporaries agree with this equivalence of terms. 'Ammār al-Baṣrī, to name one of them, rejects the equivalence of *šaḫṣ* and *uqnūm*[82]. On the other side, the Syriac lexicographer Bar Bahlūl accepts it[83]. Doubtless Abū Rā'iṭah finds the term *šaḫṣ* acceptable because it designates something on the order of a 'person', or a 'man's self'. Unlike the term 'body' (*ǧism*), a *šaḫṣ*, when divided, ceases to be a *šaḫṣ*[84]. It is instructive to note at this juncture that on the Muslim side, the Mu'tazilite *mutakallimūn*, many of whom were contemporaries of Abū Rā'iṭah, and some of whom wrote treatises against Christian beliefs, are reported to have agreed specifically that God cannot be said to be a *šaḫṣ*[85].

According to Abū Rā'iṭah, his Muslim adversary counters that something whose being is other than its hypostases, or whose hypostases are other than its being, is as a matter of fact already differentiated or at variance (*muḫtalifah*) in its description (*ṣifah*), and not at all consistent or in harmony. The mention of this objection gives Abū Rā'iṭah the opportunity to

[79] Graf, CSCO, vol. 130, pp. 105-130.
[80] *Ibid.*, p. 13.
[81] *Ibid.*, p. 24.
[82] Cf. Hayek, *op. cit.*, pp. 162-164.
[83] Rubens Duval (ed.), *Lexicon Syriacum auctore Hassano bar Bahlule* (3 vols.; Paris, 1901), vol. II, cols. 1804-1806.
[84] W.E. Lane, *An Arabic-English Lexicon* (7 vols.; London, 1863-1893), vol. IV, p. 1517. 'Ammar al-Baṣrī, by the way, rejects the term *šaḫṣ* precisely because it reminds him of a *ǧism*. Cf. Hayek, *loc. cit.*
[85] Cf. the report of al-Aš'arī in Ritter, *op. cit.*, p. 155.

ask his own question, "Is not our description (*waṣf*) of his [i.e., God's] being (*ǧawhar*) as other than his hypostases like what you describe?»[86] With this question Abū Rā'iṭah is putting his finger on the issue at hand. The Muslim describes God as living, knowing, etc. As mentioned above, these adjectives imply nouns which designate entities of some kind, i.e., acts or facts of life and knowledge. This implication is what posed the ontological problem for the Muslim *mutakallimūn*. Abū Rā'iṭah is arguing that in his view the problem is solved. The implied acts or facts refer to the three divine *aqānīm*.

We know on the testimony of the scriptures, Abū Rā'iṭah says, that God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. According to traditional Christian teaching these names specifically indicate the properties or particularities (*ḫawāṣṣ*; *ḫaṣṣah* = ἰδιότης) which distinguish the three hypostases that are the one being of God[87]. Fatherhood is the particularity of the Father, sonship is the particularity of the Son, and procession from the Father is the particularity of the Holy Spirit. Adam, Abel, and Eve, we are reminded, are the scriptural types (*širr*, μυστήριον) of these divine properties[88]. But the three divine hypostases are not three gods, as the Muslim polemicists argue[89], in the way in which Adam, Abel, and Eve are three human beings. The three divine hypostases do not exist in a state or circumstance (*ḥāl*) of materiality which provides such differentiation (*iḫtilāf*). Rather, their divine being is spiritual, non-bodily, refined[90]. The particularities (*ḫawāṣṣ*) which distinguish the divine hypostases designate merely the state or circumstance (*ḥāl*) of subsistence (*qiwām*) of each one of the hypostases in the one divine being[91].

[86] Graf, CSCO, vol. 130, p. 11.
[87] Cf. G.L. Prestige, *God in Patristic Thought* (2nd ed.; London, 1952), pp. 244-245.
[88] Graf, CSCO, vol. 130, pp. 7-9.
[89] This was the charge of 'Alī ibn-Rabbān aṭ-Ṭabarī. Cf. Khalifé and Kutsch, *art. cit.*, p. 121.
[90] Graf, CSCO, vol. 130, pp. 10 and 11.
[91] Abū Rā'iṭah's expression *ḥāl qiwām* corresponds to what the Greek theologians meant by the expression τρόπος ὑπάρξεως, i.e., mode of existence. Cf. Prestige, *op. cit.*, pp. 245-249. As a matter of fact, the Arabic word *naḥw* (pl. *anḥā'*), in its meaning of 'manner' or 'mode', corresponds more closely to the meaning of the Greek word τρόπος in this expression. Abū Rā'iṭah does indeed speak of the *anḥā'* or modes of the divine being, which correspond to the three divine *aqānīm*. Cf. Graf, CSCO, vol. 130, pp. 17 and 19. But he clearly thinks of each mode (*naḥw*) more concretely as a property or particularity (*ḫaṣṣah*) which constitutes a state (*ḥāl*) of the divine being. Hence his use of the expression *ḥāl qiwām*, or state of subsistence of the essence (*dhāt*) of each one of the *aqānīm*. It should also be mentioned here that in the usage of the Arabic grammarians, the term *ḥāl* indicates what is being attributed to a given subject when it is construed with a particular predicate (*ṣifah*). And this is one more reason for Abū Rā'iṭah's use of the term. Later, during the debates of the 10th and 11th centuries, the term *ḥāl* came to have a highly technical meaning in Muslim speculative theology. Cf. R.M. Frank, "Ḥāl," *EI*², to appear.

> God, praise be to him, is three hypostases (*aqānīm*) bound together because of the identity (*ittifāq*) of their being (*ğawhar*), and distinct because of the circumstance (*ḥāl*) of subsistence (*qiwām*) of the essence (*dhāt*) of each one of them, without their unity (*ittiṣāl*) taking precedence over their distinction or their distinction over their unity[92].

The Muslims next ask, according to Abū Rā'iṭah, "What prompts you to describe God as three *aqānīm* rather than ten or twenty, or more or fewer of them?"[93] He answers that it is the existence (*wuğūd*) of the three hypostases which is the cause (*'illah*) which prompts Christians to describe God as three hypostases[94]. Christians say that God is one being who is three hypostases for the following reason.

> God is possessed of knowledge and spirit (*dhū 'ilm wa rūḥ*). God's knowledge and his spirit are eternally existent. It is not possible to describe God, praise be to him, if he is to be described in his eternity without knowledge or spirit. Would not this statement in itself be absurd?[95]

It would be absurd to Muslims not only on the face of it, but also, as Abū Rā'iṭah well knows, because God's knowledge (*'ilm Allāh*) and God's spirit (*rūḥ Allāh*) are mentioned in the *Qur'ān* (e.g., in *Hūd* (11), 14 and *Yūsuf* (12), 87 respectively). It is noteworthy in this connection that Abū Rā'iṭah does not here mention God's word (*kalimat Allāh*) and his spirit, as do other Arabic writing Christian apologists in similar circumstances[96]. These two entities also have a place in the *Qur'ān*, where they are associated with Jesus son of Mary. But the context of the verse in which they appear, viz. *an-Nisā'* (4), 171, is explicitly anti-Trinitarian. We must judge that Abū Rā'iṭah is purposefully keeping his own argument close to the terms of the contemporary Muslim controversies, and that he is avoiding an easy rebuttal at the hands of anyone who would point out the anti-Trinitarian sentiment of this verse from the *Qur'ān*.

Since God has no origin and no originator, according to both Abū Rā'iṭah and the Muslims, they both can agree that there can be no external cause (*'illah*) for his three divine hypostases. They differ about the presence of an internal divine *'illah*, or cause. Abū Rā'iṭah sharpens the point of the difference by asking the Muslims,

> What would you answer if someone of those who deny the single one (*al-wāḥid al-fard*) whom you worship, should ask you, 'Why is he a single one, according

[92] Graf, CSCO, vol. 130, p. 16.
[93] *Ibid.*, p. 17.
[94] *Ibid.*
[95] *Ibid.*, pp. 17 and 18.
[95] *Ibid.*, pp. 17 and 18.
[96] Cf., e.g., Abū Qurrah's argument in Bacha, 1904, pp. 44 and 45.

> to you, rather than two or three or more?' What prompts you to describe him by means of this predication (*ṣifah*)? Is there, in your estimation, a cause (*'illah*) or a ground (*sabab*) for it?[97]

As we shall see, with this question Abū Rā'iṭah hopes to face the Muslims with their own theoretical dilemma, and then to press his argument that Christian doctrine provides a way to escape from it.

The significance of Abū Rā'iṭah's use of the Arabic term *'illah* in this argument, and particularly in his question to the Muslims, lies in the fact that among the *mutakallimūn* and Arabic grammarians of his day, this term was used in a technical sense to indicate the entity, that is to say the act or fact existing in a particular subject, which grounds the judgment that a particular predicate (*ṣifah*) may in truth be ascribed to that subject[98]. So, for example, an act of knowledge (*'ilm*) may be said to be the cause (*'illah*) which grounds the judgment that a given subject may be said to be knowing (*'ālim*). According to this usage, Abū Rā'iṭah can claim that the existence of the three divine hypostases is the cause (*'illah*) for describing God as *tota simul* a father (wālid), a son (*walad*), and one who processes or emanates (*munbathiq*). At another place in his treatise on the Trinity he had reminded the reader, echoing the Cappadocian fathers, that in an ontological sense the Father himself may be considered the cause (*'illah* = αἰτία) of each one of the other two divine hypostases[99]. But the Muslims, Abū Rā'iṭah is now arguing, and especially the Mu'tazilite theologians who are his contemporaries, because of their understanding of the profession of an exclusive monotheism (*at-tawḥīd*), cannot posit an *'illah* existing in God which can ground a judgment that he is to be described as a "single one". For them to do so would be to compromise their own understanding of God's absolute unity. Abū Rā'iṭah knows that this is their dilemma. It is for this reason that he offers to answer their question to the Christians in the same terms that they should logically have to answer the question put to them by the one who denies the "single one" whom they worship. He says,

> You should inform us of your answer to him about the single one (*al-wāḥid al-fard*), so that we may follow your example in replying to what you are asking us about the three [hypostases][100].

It remains to say that Abū Rā'iṭah believed that all of God's essential attributes (*ṣifāt*) may be interpreted in some way to designate his three divine hypostases. He argues that the three hypostases are the entities

[97] Graf, CSCO, vol. 130, p. 18.
[98] Cf. R.M. Frank, "*Ḥāl*", *EI²*, to appear.
[99] Graf, CSCO, vol. 130, p. 12. Cf. Prestige, *op. cit.*, pp. 252-253.
[100] Graf, CSCO, vol. 130, p. 18.

implied by standard Arabic usage, when one affirms the several descriptive predicates that are usually discussed by Muslim *mutakallimūn*. He lists them as 'living', 'knowing', 'wise', 'seeing', and 'hearing'[101]. He makes little of the latter two adjectives, as is also the case among the Muslims. They are included because of their prominence in the *Qur'ān*. The lists of predicates, coming from different Muslim scholars, differed in the adjectives which were included as expressing the essential divine attributes. But this difference does not affect the course of Abū Rā'iṭah's argument. As far as he is concerned, all of God's essential or "natural" predicates are indicative of the three divine *aqānīm*. He can easily find in Christian tradition ways to construe 'life', 'knowledge', 'wisdom', etc., with the divine hypostases. We must highlight this point because an influential recently published study of the relationship between Christian and Muslim *mutakallimūn* seriously misinterprets the purposes and influences of such Arabic writing Christian apologists as Abū Rā'iṭah. Missing the point that these Christian apologists are taking their cue from the Muslim *mutakallimūn*, and not *vice versa*, Harry Austryn Wolfson in his erudite study of the philosophical roots of *'ilm al-kalām* in Islam, launches himself on a fruitless search for varying Neoplatonic triads to explain the variations in Muslim lists of God's essential attributes[102]. His mistaken initial assumption is that the Muslims have borrowed these lists from Christians.

Before concluding his argument that it is the existence of the three divine hypostases that prompts Christians to describe God in terms of these hypostases, Abū Rā'iṭah returns to the quotation from the *Qur'ān* he had employed earlier in his treatise on the Trinity, viz., "Like him there is aught" (*aš-Šurā* (42), 11). He now argues that only that religion which describes God in accord with the terms of this verse can be considered truly to worship and acknowledge him. Any other religion, which describes God in terms of anthropomorphism (*at-tašbīh*) or comparison with creatures (*at-tamthīl*), must be considered wrong or unknowing. Once again, in the enunciation of this principle, Abū Rā'iṭah is attempting to establish a common ground with his Muslim contemporaries. Their *mutakallimūn* regularly rejected anthropomorphism and comparisons drawn between God and creatures, using the same terms for them that Abū Rā'iṭah employs here[103]. As a matter of fact, Muslims accused Christians of *at-tašbīh* because of their

[101] Cf. *ibid.*, p. 8.
[102] Harry Austryn Wolfson, *The Philosophy of the Kalam* (Cambridge, Mass., 1976), pp. 112-132.
[103] Cf. W. Montgomery Watt, *The Formative Period* ..., *op. cit.*, pp. 246-249; R. Strothmann, "*Tashbih*," *EI*[1], vol. 4, pp. 719-722.

doctrine that God has a son[104]. Abū Rā'iṭah sets out to answer this charge, and to claim that Christianity alone preserves God's uniqueness. He returns to the numerology we have described above.

Most monotheists (*muwaḥḥidūn*), Abū Rā'iṭah explains, describe God as a "single one in number" (*wāḥidan fardan ma'dūdan*). However, as he pointed out earlier, and as he now recalls, such a description as this is also applicable to creatures. Any one of them can be described as a single one in number. Furthermore, the application of this description to God actually lowers God's numerical value in comparison to creatures. The latter are composed of two principles, matter and form. So the Christian description of God as one being in three hypostases transcends all anthropomorphism or comparison with creatures. There are three hypostases, no more and no less, because 'three' is the single perfect number. As a single number it expresses the unity of God's being. As 'three' it is the perfect number, allowing for the individuation (*infirād*) of the subsistence (*qiwām*) of the essence (*dhāt*) of each one of the modes (*anḥā'*) of the divine being. Since 'three' is the perfect number, comprising both even and odd numbers as explained earlier, no reasonable person should admit any other number, higher or lower, in the description of God[105].

At the end of the treatise on the Trinity Abū Rā'iṭah takes up one last objection to this teaching. It is actually the basic objection which has been lurking beneath the surface all along the way. The Muslims propose that something may be said to be 'of' or 'from' something else in only two ways. It is either a part (*ba'ḍ*) of that something else, or its action (*fi'l*). Here the reader should recall that this disjunction reflects the division among God's descriptive predicates (*ṣifāt*) which was discussed above. They are either predicates of his essence (*dhāt*) or predicates of his action (*fi'l*). In either case, by reason of the conventions of Arabic usage, they imply, as we have already explained several times, the affirmation of distinct entities in God. This is a completely unacceptable conclusion for the Muslims since parts (*ab'aḍ*) are thereby implied in God's essence. Abū Rā'iṭah's answer to this final objection is that the Christian doctrine of the Trinity demonstrates that the disjunction in terms of which the Muslims state their dilemma is not complete. In the first place, Abū Rā'iṭah proposes, parts (*ab'āḍ*) may be ascribed to something in at least two ways. One may speak of individuals, such as Aaron and Moses, for example, as parts of the number of men, each one of which is perfect (*kāmil*) in essence. Or one may speak of hands

[104] Cf., e.g., the charge of al-Ǧāḥiẓ in his "Refutation of Christians". He says that in part their errors are due to trust in anthropomorphism (*i'tiqād at-tašbīh*). Finkel, *op. cit.*, p. 25.
[105] Graf, CSCO, vol. 130, pp. 18 and 19.

and feet as parts or components (*ağzā'*) of a man, which are not the whole (*kamāl*) of that of which they are the parts, and they may not carry the name (*ism*) of the whole. The disjunction proposed by the Muslims is not complete, Abū Rā'iṭah contends, because a thing may be 'from' another thing, not only as its part (*ba'ḍ*), or even as its action (*fi'l*), but in the sense of a perfect or whole being 'of' or 'from' a perfect, whole being (*kāmil min kāmilin*). One has only to think of a son (*walad*) from his father (*wālid*). One should also remember Eve as a person who processes or emanates (*ḫāriğ*, *munbathiq*) from Adam. It is in these two ways that Christians, leaving behind the materiality that distinguishes the three human beings, Adam, Abel, and Eve, speak of the Son and the Spirit as 'of' or 'from' the Father. "Each one of the two of them is part (*ba'ḍ*) of the number [i.e., three], not part of the essence (*dhāt*) of the Father. Rather, they are two perfect essences from a perfect essence"[106].

The fact remains, Abū Rā'iṭah says in closing, even with the Trinitarian formula, "God transcends every prediction (*ṣifah*), and no statement [about him] of this sort is comprehensive"[107].

ii. *Comparison*. This is not the place to give an elaborate analysis of the examples Abū Rā'iṭah uses in his apology for the doctrine of the Trinity. They do, as a matter of fact, take up much of the space in his treatise. They are an essential part of his attempt to demonstrate that the doctrine he is defending is not simply a contradiction. He proposes analogies which can be drawn between various aspects of the doctrine and observable facts of created nature. Just as the Greek philosophico-theological terms that he attempts to render into the Arabic idiom of the Muslim *mutakallimūn* are the traditional ones to be found in the Trinitarian formulae, so too his examples or analogies are the traditional ones found in earlier phases of Christian apologetics. He uses the example of three lights from three lamps, which he says are similar to the three divine hypostases in being able to be described as three and one at the same time[108]. He mentions the sun, its light, and its heat; the five bodily senses; the human soul, its mind, its power of speech. These are entities which he says may be simultaneously described, without contradiction, as united and yet distinguishable, like the three divine hypostases[109].

What is important to notice about Abū Rā'iṭah's use of these examples or similitudes in his apologetics is his designation of the process of reasoning

[106] *Ibid.*, pp. 26.
[107] *Ibid.*
[108] *Ibid.*, pp. 4-5.
[109] *Ibid.*, pp. 11-12.

in which they play a role by the Arabic term *qiyās*. Among the contemporary Muslim *mutakallimūn*, this term is used to indicate the general process of arriving at a conclusion on the basis of reasoning. It is opposed to the practice of arriving at a conclusion on the basis of an authoritative testimony[110]. But the Christian Arabic writers of Abū Rā'iṭah's time use the term in the more specific sense of reasoning by analogy. Furthermore, they often do not mean by it a syllogistic or other inferential form of analogical reasoning. Their analogies are examples or comparisons, and their purpose is clarification. They serve as precedents, almost in a legal sense, in which some known fact is called upon to elucidate and explain what otherwise seems obscure and even contradictory. More than once, as his adversary attacks his analogy because he does not push it far enough, Abū Rā'iṭah must respond, "What is comparable in some ways, the difference overcomes"[111]. He points out that if a comparison could be made in all respects between two things there would be no similarity between them at all but identity.

This use of examples, and the discussion of the range of their applicability in theological reasoning in general, can be found in earlier Christian literature. Its appearance in Arabic under the name *qiyās* demonstrates once again the attempt on the part of the Christian Arabic apologists to put their traditional methods of reasoning into an Arabic dress that is familiar to Muslims. The method of reasoning designated by the term *qiyās* in Arabic was for a long time a major feature of the Muslim legal tradition[112]. By utilizing the term in the present context Abū Rā'iṭah is once again following the usages of the *mutakallimūn*.

3. The Incarnation

Abū Rā'iṭah states and defends the Christian doctrine of the Incarnation, following the same basic methodology he employs in his defense of the doctrine of the Trinity. That is to say, he attempts to make contact with the conceptual and lexical 'common ground' that Christians may share with Muslims in Arabic. This 'common ground', however, is more scriptural in the area of the doctrine of the Incarnation than it is in the discussion of the Trinity. In the latter instance the Muslim concern for a proper understanding of the *ṣifāt Allāh* supplies a philosophical context in which the Christian

[110] Cf. Josef van Ess, "The Logical Structure of Islamic Theology," in G. E. von Grunebaum (ed.), *Logic in Classical Islamic Culture* (Wiesbaden, 1970), pp. 34-35.
[111] Graf, CSCO, vol. 130, p. 12.
[112] Cf. Josef van Ess, *Die Erkenntnislehre des 'Abudaddīn al-Īcī* (Wiesbaden, 1966), pp. 380-394.

can defend himself against the charge of tritheism. In regard to the doctrine of the Incarnation, not only is there the explicit rejection in the *Qur'ān* of the notion that God generates or is generated (*al-Iḫlāṣ*, 112), there are particular statements in the *Qur'ān* about the Messiah, ʿIsā ibn Maryam, to the effect that he is only a messenger of God, and his word, which God has delivered to Maryam, and a spirit from Him, as it says in *an-Nisā'* (4), 171. "They have disbelieved", *al-Mā'idah* (5), 72 insists, "who say that God is the Messiah, son of Maryam". There is no philosophical controversy among the Muslim *mutakallimūn* during the first Abbasid century which offers the Christian apologist an opportunity to utilize Muslim theoretical developments in favor of his incarnation faith. The most important point at issue here between Muslims and Christians is the proposed divinity of Jesus Christ, and the very possibility of a divine incarnation. As is evident from the passages quoted from the *Qur'ān*, both groups agree on some of the epithets to be applied to Jesus, including his humanity and that he is Word of God. There is a difference of doctrine over the crucifixion of Jesus, but that subject will be the concern of a subsequent section of this paper.

As for Abū Rā'iṭah's belief in the divinity of Jesus Christ and that he is one of the three divine hypostases, viz., the divine son who has become incarnate (*al-mutağassad*), he depends upon what he considers to be the obvious witness of the New Testament. Contemporary Muslim, anti-christian polemicists were familiar with this argument, and they responded by citing biblical passages which they considered to be obvious references to Jesus' full humanity[113]. This practice can already be found in the *Qur'ān*. "The Messiah, son of Maryam, was only a messenger .... His mother was just a woman. They both ate food" (*al-Mā'idah* (5), 75). There is not much to be learned for our present purposes by a review of these scriptural passages, as cited by either side. What we must observe here is the way in which Abū Rā'itah appeals to certain Muslim beliefs and Arabic expressions, as often as not phrases from the *Qur'ān*, in order to support what he regards as the reasonableness or the non-contradictory nature of the Christian doctrine.

a. Monophysite Formulae

The Christian doctrine of the Incarnation that is orthodox for Abū Rā'iṭah is the monophysite doctrine. He is quite anxious to state it clearly and unambiguously so that he can demonstrate its resiliency against the objections of the Muslims. As he expresses it, their basic objection is that the Christian

[113] Cf. especially the refutations of ʿAlī Rabbān aṭ-Ṭabarī, in Khalifé and Kutsch, *art. cit.*; and al-Qāsim b. Ibrāhīm, in Di Matteo, *art. cit.*

formula is self-contradictory. It describes God's incarnation (*tağassud*) and his becoming human (*ta'annus*) as taking place without change or alteration in God. It characterizes him as both mortal and immortal, passible and impassible. On the other hand, the doctrine clearly stated, Abū Rā'iṭah presumes, demonstrates that there is no contradiction here. We can do no better than to quote his summary of the monophysite position from his general apology for Christianity.

> We say that Christ, be he praised, the eternal, unceasing word of God, became incarnate from the pure virgin Mary, in a body possessed of a rational soul, which is originated, created, mortal, passible. And he became one with it in a [hypostatic], natural, substantial union, like the union of the spiritual soul with the body of man ... without change to either one of the two of them, i.e., the Word or the body. And so the consequence is that the computation of the two beings comes down to the result of the existence (*wuğūd*) of a single being .... It is true God and true man. In itself it is not two, but it carries two [sets] of descriptive predicates[114].

Abū Rā'iṭah explains that these two sets of descriptive predicates are those which are proper to the Word God, and those which are proper to the ensouled human body, which the Word has put on as a garment (*sirbāl*). The incarnation (*tağassud*), therefore, is to be thought of as an action of the Word. Consequently, there is no contradiction in the Christian formula, he argues, when one is careful to specify the aspect (*ğihah*) from which each element of the formula describes the Word incarnate. The closest analogy (*qiyās*) to this situation, Abū Rā'iṭah proposes, is the one substance man, who is composed of two different substances, a rational soul and a body. Man too can be described by two sets of predicates, without contradiction. Yet man is in himself one being. This is the traditional Monophysite example, elaborated upon by Severus of Antioch[115]. Abū Rā'iṭah puts it into Arabic.

One should notice that Abū Rā'iṭah is not trying to prove the doctrine of the incarnation from reason. This may have been the case at least in part with his handling of the doctrine of the Trinity, where the Muslim controversy concerning the *ṣifāt Allāh* gave him an opening. In the instance of the doctrine of the Incarnation, he contents himself with the attempt to

[114] Graf, CSCO, vol. 130, p. 151. The adjective 'hypostatic' was added in the margin of the MS. Cf. *ibid.*, vol. 131, p. 183, n. 1.

[115] Cf. Joseph Lebon, *Le monophysitisme sévérien; étude historique littéraire et théologique sur la résistance monophysite au concile de Chalcédoine jusqu'à la constitution de l'église jacobite* (Louvain, 1909); *idem.*, "La christologie du monophysitisme syrien", in A. Grillmeier and H. Bacht (eds.), *Das Konzil von Chalkedon* (3 vols.; Würzburg, 1951), vol. I, pp. 425-580.

prove, with the help of some concepts already explained in connection with his discussion of the Trinity, that a careful statement of the Christian incarnational formula avoids contradiction.

b. Renewal of Creation

According to Abū Rā'iṭah, the Muslims' first question to the Christians about their doctrine of the Incarnation is, "What prompted God, praised be he, to the incarnation (*taǧassud*), and to becoming human (*ta'annus*)? Would he not have been able to bring about the salvation of man (*ḫalāṣ al-bašar*) without this?"[116] As Abū Qurrah, Abū Rā'iṭah's Melkite contemporary, points out, and as the *Qur'ān* itself assures the reader, in regard to man's sinful condition the Muslim believes, "Who so repents, after his evildoing, and makes amends, God will turn towards him; God is all-forgiving, all-compassionate" (*al-Mā'idah* (5), 39, Arberry)[117]. *At-tawbah*, therefore, or the turning of man to God after his sinfulness, is what God accepts from his servants for forgiveness, as the *sūrah* of this name in the *Qur'ān* insists (i.e., 9, 104). There is no need, in the Muslim view, for a general redemption of mankind in the Christian sense of the word. Moreover, the Muslim also knows from the *Qur'ān* that God has sent messengers, including Jesus and Muḥammad, to prompt men to the saving act of repentance. Against this background, Abū Rā'iṭah attempts to answer both parts of the question he has posed for himself, adhering as closely as possible to the thought and language of the *Qur'an*.

"What prompted God to the incarnation?" Abū Rā'iṭah answers that, as we learn from the Scriptures, when men fell into perdition and death because of their sinfulness, in his compassion and kindness in the face of their need, God announced a renewal of creation, or a new creation (*taǧdīd al-ḫalq*). This promise is what prompted him to the incarnation. Who is more fitting to be entrusted with this renewal, Abū Rā'iṭah asks, than the one who created men in the first place? If the idea of God's stooping down for mankind's salvation and his deliverance in these latter times should be considered a frivolity (*'abathan*), his argument continues, then it should also follow that what prompted God to create man in the first place was not praiseworthy.

On the face of it Abū Rā'iṭah's argument thus far is clear enough and even familiar to us in terms of Christian categories of thought. What is striking, however, is his use of several phrases which have the ring of the *Qur'ān* about them. His use of the phrase *taǧdīd al-ḫalq*, for example, seems to owe its presence here more to the occurrence of the expression *ḫalq ǧadīd* (i.e., new creation), as found six times in the *Qur'ān*, than it does to any specifically Christian usage. In the *Qur'ān*, of course, the expression does not mean what it would mean in a Christian context. Rather, in four instances in the *Qur'ān* it means the raising of the dead for judgment (cf. *ar-Ra'd* (13), 15; *as-Saǧdah* (32), 10; *as-Sabā'* (34), 7; *Qāf* (50), 15). Twice it refers to God's power to put away the present generation and to bring a new creation (cf. *Ibrāhīm* (14), 19; *Fāṭir* (35), 16). An apologist like Abū Rā'iṭah, however, uses phrases from the *Qur'ān* because they are familiar to Muslims, not because they convey a peculiarly Christian message. He puts his own Christian meaning onto it. The conclusion that such is his intention here, namely to compare Christian redemption to God's new creation of man as referred to in the *Qur'ān*, is supported when we note that he also argues that if God's deliverance of men in these latter times is a frivolity (*'abathan*), then what prompted him to create them in the first place was not praiseworthy. This phraseology also echoes a sentence from the *Qur'ān*. In *al-Mu'minūn* (23), 115, God says to people at the final judgment, "Do you think that we created you as a frivolity (*'abathan*), and that you would not return to us?" It is with this sentence in mind that we perceive the course of Abū Rā'iṭah's argument. He is maintaining that without salvation or a new creation of man brought about by God incarnate, the first creation would have to be considered a frivolity, given the factual preponderance of sin and man's consequent perdition according to the Law. In regard to the Law's promise of perdition for sin and God's consequent promise of salvation for his people, Abū Rā'iṭah doubtless has in mind the *Qur'ān*'s assurance that, "God never breaks his promise, though most men do not know it" (*ar-Rūm* (30), 6). The necessity of God's fulfillment of his promise is the backbone of his argument. By way of contrast, it is important to note that Abū Rā'iṭah does not attempt to answer the Muslims' question in more traditional Christian theological terms. We find here no mention of man's basic, almost ontological, need for redemption if he is to achieve salvation. The emphasis is on what God promised in the scriptures, and what finds an echo in the *Qur'ān*.

"Would he not have been able to bring about the salvation of man without this?" Abū Rā'iṭah's answer to this part of his question is twofold. In the first place he reminds the reader that God is omnipotent. To ask such a question as the one posed here, he maintains, is tantamount to the disavowal of God's action in the determination (*taqdīr*) of affairs, and in their origination (*takwīn*); as well as a disavowal of his power (*qudrah*), and his will (*irādah*), which is logically consequent upon his prior knowledge. Self

[116] Graf, CSCO, vol. 130, p. 148.

[117] Cf. Abū Qurrah's presentation of this Muslim allegation in Bacha, 1904, *op. cit.*, pp. 83-84.

contradiction is what God cannot do. He in fact does what he knows will be for the benefit of his creatures, in the way in which they can best accept it. "For everything that he wills, for that he is able (*qādir*), because nothing that he wills is too difficult for him, and anything that he empowers cannot be prevented from coming to be"[118]. In this response, Abū Rā'iṭah is arguing that the incarnation is actually the best way that God can bring about the new creation of man which he has promised. By putting this argument in the context of God's power of efficient causality (*qudrah*), and his divine will (*irādah*), Abū Rā'iṭah is once again using terms which were prominent in the discussions of the contemporary Muslim *mutakallimūn*. He is also calling to mind the many verses of the *Qur'ān* in which the divine epithet *qādir* occurs, as well as such verses as, "God does what he wills" (*al-Ḥaǧǧ* (22), 14, and "God wills ease for you, and wills not hardship for you" (*al-Baqarah* (2), 185). This is not a direct answer to the question. It is designed to make it difficult for a Muslim to maintain that God's incarnation is impossible.

The second part of Abū Rā'iṭah's response to the Muslims' question is an attempt to turn their own challenge back on themselves. He asks, "What would they answer if someone should ask them about God's policy, praise be to him, in regard to mankind, and his sending messengers to them? Why did the Compassionate One do that when he could have done something else, as well as sending them [i.e., the messengers] to them?"[119] Doubtless, Abū Rā'iṭah says, the Muslims would answer that God sent messengers so that they could be a conclusive argument (*ḥuǧǧah bālighah*, cf. *al-An'ām* (6), 149) against men, to bid them to do what he wills, and to warn them of what he finds odious and detestable. Those who obey, being uncompelled, would deserve the fairest reward (*ḥusnu th-thawābi*, cf. *Āl-'Imrān* (3), 195) for their preference of obedience to God, rather than to their own desires. Their drawing near to God with a good intention (*husni niyyah*) would make for a noble reward. Their drawing far off from God would make for a dire punishment because they would be following their own lusts, and choosing present pleasure over the blessings to come. This response fairly represents the *Qur'ān*'s attitude. Abū Rā'iṭah knows that it expresses what the Muslims have in mind when they ask, "Would God not have been able to bring about the salvation of man without incarnation?" Now there arises the issue of sending messengers *versus* incarnation as the most likely means for God to provide for the salvation of man. The Muslims, as we have seen, are committed to the *Qur'ān*'s insistence, "The Messiah, son of Maryam,

[118] Graf, 1951, vol. 130, p. 149.
[119] *Ibid.*

was only a messenger, before whom messengers have passed away" (*al-Mā'idah* (5), 75). This is the very heart of the argument.

c. Messenger or God Incarnate?

As Abū Rā'iṭah reports it, the Muslims object to the Christian doctrine by maintaining that the sending of messengers from God is not at all on the same plane as maintaining God's own involvement in human affairs, i.e., his incarnation, or becoming human, according to the Christian way of describing things. Therefore, the Muslims argue, it is not fair for Abū Rā'iṭah to represent the two actions as equivalent when he challenges the Muslims. He had asked them earlier, as we have seen, the same question about God's sending of messengers, as they had asked him about the possibility of God becoming incarnate, viz., could God have done something else? The implication of the Christian answer to this question is that God's mercy and generosity make both actions appropriate in their own spheres, i.e., sending messengers and becoming incarnate. But the point of the present Muslim claim that the two actions ascribed to God are in no way equivalent or comparable, is to argue that the doctrine of the Incarnation is simply incredible because it is absurd to ascribe such an action to God.

Abū Rā'iṭah rebuts this argument by answering that the doctrine of the Incarnation can only be considered to be incredible, or absurd, if we are thinking of God as comparable to ourselves in being and in power. On this basis, he agrees, the sending of messengers is easier to maintain. But if we differ from God in regard to being and power, as well as in regard to his other predicates, as we obviously do, then God's permission (*idhn*), his command (*amr*), and his sending of messengers (*irsāl ar-rusul*) are no easier to belive than his becoming incarnate and his becoming human for the sake of the salvation of his servants. God's actions cannot be measured by the actions of men. What prompts God to all of these actions, Abū Rā'iṭah argues, is his compassion and mercy. God's permission, his command, and his sending of messengers are divine actions which are often mentioned in the *Qur'ān*. His incarnation and the actions by which he achieved the redemption are recounted in the Gospel.

On this point the Muslim has one more objection. He asks, how can the Christians maintain with logical consistency that God is unchangeable and unalterable if they also maintain that he has assumed a composite being (i.e., a humanity composed of body and soul), that is itself receptive to change alteration? Abū Rā'iṭah's answer is that it is no different than saying that God acts and creates by means of permission (*idhn*) and speech (*qawl*), without instrument or tool, and with no precaution against mistake or

error. This too we cannot understand. And so, "We accept the doctrine about his incarnation and his becoming human, without change or alteration, even though the comprehension of it exceeds the mind"[120].

d. Crucifixion and Death

In his epistle on the Incarnation, Abū Rā'iṭah discusses many more details of the Muslim objections to this doctrine than those we have mentioned. We have included in our review, the main topics of his discussion, as he himself outlined them in his general apology for the Christian faith. Before bringing our analysis of his treatment of this topic to a close, however, we must say something about his response to the well-known Muslim claim that Jesus was not, in fact, crucified by the Jews. The claim is based on a statement about the Jews to be found in the *Qur'ān*, *an-Nisā'* (4), 157. Under general discussion here is the punishment God is said to have visited upon the Jews for their alleged breaking of their covenant with him, "And for their saying, 'We slew the Mesiah, Jesus son of Mary, the Messenger of God'—yet they did not slay him, neither crucified him, only a likeness of that was shown to them (*šubbiha lahum*)." Abū Rā'iṭah does not quote this verse, nor does he refer to it directly. Rather, he deals with the Muslim objection to the actuality of the crucifixion of Jesus by citing a long string of testimonies from the Gospel which report the event. He does, however, discuss the crucifixion and death of Jesus in terms of what he regards as the evil intention of the Jews in the affair. This, after all, is also the context of the quotation from the *Qur'ān*. It alleges that the Jews were not successful in slaying or crucifying Jesus, according to their boast. The emphasis seems to be more on their supposed malicious intent than it is on what factually happened to Jesus.

The presumed malicious intent of the Jews in the matter of the crucifixion of Christ provides the context for one of the regular challenges which Muslims posed to Christians during the first Abbasid century. Abū Rā'iṭah phrases it as follows. "Was his killing and his crucifixion with his consent, or by force?"[121] The question poses a dilemma. If the Christian says that Jesus consented to his own death, the Muslim answers that in that case not only is there no blame that can be placed on the Jews, but they should be rewarded for following Christ's will. This is clearly an unacceptable option to the Christians of Abū Rā'iṭah's day. On the other hand, if the Christian

[120] *Ibid.*, p. 150.
[121] *Ibid.*, p. 60. Cf. the patriarch Timothy's response to this same question in A. Mingana, "Timothy's Apology for Christianity", in *Woodbrooke Studies* (vol. 2; Cambridge, 1928), p. 43; and Abū Qurrah in *PG*, 97, col. 1529.

says that Jesus was forcibly killed, then the Muslim asks, "What kind of a God is forced?"[122] In this fashion, by an appeal to what he considers to be an erroneous Christian doctrine in the first place, i.e., the Incarnation, the Muslim hopes to argue against the Christians' acceptance of the actuality of Christ's crucifixion at the hands of the Jews. Abū Rā'iṭah escapes from the dilemma, as do the other Christian apologists who mention it, by arguing that a distinction must be made between what was done, Christ's acquiescence in the event, and the intention of the Jews. The latter, he maintains, was clearly malevolent. He poses a similar dilemma in response to the Muslim. He mentions the *Qur'ān*'s strictures against those who contrive falsehoods against God (cf. e.g., *an-Nisā'* (4), 50). He asks if such falsehoods are propounded with or without God's compliance. The same range of options, of course, are open to the respondent as in the instance of Christ's crucifixion. Abū Rā'iṭah concludes,

> The Jews are punishable for his crucifixion and his slaying, because they intended his destruction, even though he, praise be to him, is exalted beyond that, because of the transcendence of his 'being' beyond slaying and death. Just as someone is punishable for slander against God, even though God is high indeed beyond that[123].

So a dilemma is met with a dilemma, and the Christian and Muslim views of the facts remain as they were.

4. Christian Life and Practice

In his general apology for Christianity Abū Rā'iṭah responds to a number of Muslim questions about Christian practices. The questions are the standard ones which are found in most of the popular apologetic literature of the first Abbasid century. A curious fact about these questions is that their subject matter conforms to a list of unscriptural but apostolic customs mentioned ready by Basil in his treatise on the Holy Spirit[124]. We are reminded that even the Muslims required an explanation from Christians for their non-scriptural behavior. It was not just that the Muslims found these usages strange. They could not find them in the Bible. Here we shall not record Abū Rā'iṭah's replies in detail. Rather, we shall note the general defense he proposes in each instance.

[122] Graf, 1951, vol. 130, p. 60.
[123] *Ibid.*, p. 63.
[124] Cf. the discussion in Prestige, *op. cit.*, p. 19.

a. Veneration of the Cross

Muslims commonly objected to the Christian veneration of the cross, and to the installation of the cross in a place of honor in Christian churches. They considered it to be a species of idol worship (*ʿibādat al ʿawthān*), or the veneration of images (*sağdat al-ʿaṣnām*)[125]. Abū Rāʾiṭah's answer to the objection is that the cross is not an object of Christian worship. Rather, he says, in their churches the cross marks the *qiblah* for Christians. Therefore, it deserves honor and respect more than other things[126]. Abū Rāʾiṭah was surely aware of the fact that in the *Qurʾān* it was reported that God instructed Moses and Aaron to set up certain houses, "And make your houses a direction for men to pray to; and perform the prayer; and so thou give good tidings to the believers" (*Yūnas* (10), 87). He argues accordingly, that in Christian churches the cross simply points out the direction one should face when praying.

b. Facing East in Prayer

Another standard question which Muslims posed for Christians during their encounters in the first Abbasid century concerns the Christian practice of facing east at times of prayer. Abū Rāʾiṭah explains that they face the east because it is the traditional location of the Garden of Eden, and because that is the direction from which Christ will first appear at his second coming according to Mt. 24:27[127]. The *Qurʾān*, of course, has it that, "To God belong the East and the West; withersoever you turn, there is the face of God" (*al-Baqarah* (2), 115).

c. Eucharist

To the Muslim query about the Christian belief concerning the presence of Christ's body and blood in the bread and wine of the Eucharist, Abū Rāʾiṭah answers by reciting Christ's charge to his disciples at the last supper, as contained in "His book, the Gospel"[128]. The latter phrase recalls the *Qurʾān*'s statement that God brought the Gospel to Christ (*al-Māʾidah* (5), 46). This question about the Eucharist was also a common one on the lips of Muslims in the religious controversaries of Abū Rāʾiṭah's time[129].

[125] Cf., e.g., D. Sourdel, "Un pamphlet musulman anonyme d'époque ʿAbbāside contre les chrétiens", *Revue des Études Islamiques* 34 (1966), pp. 17 and 29; and ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī in Hayek, *op. cit.*, pp. 87 and 88.

[126] Graf, 1951, vol. 130, pp. 153 and 154.

[127] *Ibid.*, pp. 155 and 156.

[128] *Ibid.*, p. 155.

[129] Cf., e.g., ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī's response, in Hayek, *op. cit.*, pp. 84-87.

d. Circumcision and the Sacrifices of the Old Testament

Muslims often asked the Christians by what authority they abandoned such Old Testament practices as circumcision and the sacrifices mandated by the Law[130]. Abū Rāʾiṭah's answer to this question is that the original purpose of these observances was to win the Israelite people back to God after they had become infected with heathen religious practices in Egypt. The old dispensation was temporary, he argues, and designed merely to mark out the chosen people. It was destined to be replaced by the new covenant as Jeremiah (31:31) and Ezekiel (16:60) had foretold. Abū Rāʾiṭah also reminds his readers that the sacrifices of the Old Testament were a *mysterium* (*širr*), or type, of the sacrifice of Christ to be offered for all men under the new covenant[131].

As for the new covenant itself, Abū Rāʾiṭah explains that it is the Gospel. It transcribes into its own laws (*šarāʾiʿ*) the laws and sanctions of the Torah which are agreeable to it and suitable, concerning true belief in God and the profession of his oneness (*at-tawḥīd*). Further, he maintains, the Gospel explains and interprets the monotheism of the Torah, by naming the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Whatsoever in the Old Testament is not in accord with this new awareness is not binding, he argues. As for the difference between the old and new sets of prescriptions (*farāʾiḍ*), it amounts to the difference between force and justice, in Abū Rāʾiṭah's view. This is the reason, he says, for abandoning the prescriptions of the Torah without claiming that they are wrong or false[132].

e. The Forty Day Fast

At the very end of what we have left of Abū Rāʾiṭah's general apology for Christianity, he explains that Christians fast for forty days at a time because of the examples of Moses, the prophets, and Christ himself[133]. Muslims, of course, are commanded by the *Qurʾān* to fast during the month of *Ramaḍān*, when the revelation was said to have come down from God (cf. *al-Baqarah* (2), 183-185). But the fast is required only during the daylight hours and not at night (cf. vs. 187). It lasts only for the thirty days of the month. The latter fact is presumably what provides the occasion for Abū Rāʾiṭah's explanation of the Christian practice.

[130] Cf. Theodore bar Kônî's long response to this objection in Scher, *op. cit.*, vol. 69, pp. 213ff.

[131] Graf, 1951, vol. 130, pp. 156-157.

[132] *Ibid.*, p. 158.

[133] *Ibid.*, p. 159.

III

ʿAMMĀR AL-BAṢRĪ'S *KITĀB AL-BURHĀN*: CHRISTIAN *KALĀM* IN THE FIRST ABBASID CENTURY

The formal style of Islamic religious discourse in Arabic, known as *ʿilm al-kalām*, came into prominence in the first Abbasid century. Indissolubly linked with the story of its origins are the names of the cities in Iraq where the new science flourished: Baṣrah, Kūfah, Baghdad. Many scholars have searched for its roots in such previous facts as the pre-Islamic Christian intellectural synthesis, be it in Greek or Syriac; in the Greek philosophical tradition; or in the circles that cultivated the growth of Arabic grammatical theory. Arabic grammatical science had already achieved eminence in the eighth century, with the publication of Sībawayhīs (d.c. 795) famous *al-Kitāb*[1]. Some scholars interpret the *Kalām* as primarily an exercise in Islamic apologetics[2]. Others view it as simply the obvious academic response to the intellectual problems posed by God's revelation in the Arabic *Qur'ān*[3]. But a neglected item in the discussion of the growth of the Islamic *ʿilm al-kalām* has been the parallel progress of Christian apologetics in Arabic.

Already in the first Abbasid century, especially in Iraq, Christian scholars were beginning to elaborate a theoretical defense of their own doctrines and religious practices in an Arabic idiom that obviously resembles the subjects and methods of discussion current among the contemporary Muslem *mutakallimūm*. Their knowledge of the *Qur'an* was

[1] Cf. Friedrich NIEWÖHNER, «Die Diskussion um den Kalām und die Mutakallimūn in der europäischen Philosophiegeschichtsschreibung», *Archiv für Begriffsgeschichte* 18 (1974), pp. 7-34; Josef VAN ESS, «The Logical Structure of Islamic Theology», in G.E. VON GRUNEBAUM (ed), *Logic in Classical Islamic Culture* (Wiesbaden, 1970), pp. 21-50; *idem*, «The Beginnings of Islamic Theology», in J. MURDOCH & E. SYLLA (eds.), *The Cultural Context of Medieval Learning* (Boston, 1975), pp. 89-111; *idem*, «Disputationspraxis in der islamischen Theologie, eine vorläufige Skizze», *Revue des Études Islamiques* 44 (1976), pp. 23-60; M.A. COOK, «The Origins of Kalam», *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 43 (1980), pp. 32-43.

[2] Cf. Louis GARDET, «Quelques réflexions sur la place du *ʿilm al-kalām* dans les 'sciences religieuses' musulmanes», in George MAKDISI (ed.), *Arabic and Islamic Studies in Honor of Hamilton A.R. Gibb* (Cambridge, 1965), pp. 258-269; S. PINES, «A Note on an Early Meaning of the Term *Mutakallim*», *Israel Oriental Studies* 1 (1971), pp. 224-240; *idem*, «Some Traits of Christian Theological Writing in Relation to Moslem *Kalām* and to Jewish Thought», *Proceedings of the Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities* 5 (1976), pp. 105-125.

[3] Cf. Richard M. FRANK, *Beings and Their Attributes; the Teaching of the Basrian School of the Muʿtazila in the Classical Period* (Albany, N.Y., 1978).

extensive. They were attentive to the arguments of the Muslim scholars, and there is abundant evidence in both Islamic and Christian sources to show that Christian and Muslim *mutakallimūn* often met together in scholarly *mağālis* for the purpose of critically examining the tenets of their respective religious communities in the dialogical, debating manner (*al-munāẓarah*), that became the characteristic style of the *ʿilm al-kalām*[4].

The most prominent Christian *mutakallimūm* of the first Abbasid century were Theodore Abū Qurrah (d.c. 825), a Melkite, Ḥabīb ibn Ḥidmah Abū Rāʾiṭah (d.c. 850), a Jacobite, and ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī (d.c. 845), a Nestorian. The works of Abū Qurrah and Abū Rāʾiṭah have long been known. They have been published in modern editions, translated into western languages, and a small collection of interpretive studies has grown up around them[5]. The works of ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, on the other hand, have only been available in a modern edition since 1977, with Michel Hayek's publication of the unique text of this author's two known treatises, as contained in the British Museum Arabic MS 801. The manuscript was written in Cairo, under Coptic auspices, in

[4] For one example, cf. the report of conversations between the Nestorian, Pethion, and Ibn Kullāb in the *Fihrist* of Ibn an-Nadīm, Bayard DODGE, *The Fihrist of al-Nadim, a Tenth-Century Survey of Muslim Culture* (2 vols.; New York, 1970), vol. I, pp. 447-449 (citat.: DODGE). For further references cf. Sidney H. GRIFFITH, «The Prophet Muḥammad, His Scripture and His Message, According to the Christian Apologies in Arabic and Syriac from the First Abbasid Century», in *La Vie du prophète Mahomet*. (Un colloque organisé par le Centre de Recherche d'Histoire des Religions, Université des Sciences Humaines de Strasbourg, 23-24 Octobre 1980; Paris, 1983), pp. 99-146.

[5] For Abū Qurrah, cf. the following works: I. ARENDZEN, *Theodori Abu Kurra de cultu imaginum libellus e codice arabico nunc primum editus latine versus illustratus* (Bonn, 1877); Constantin BACHA, *Les œuvres arabes de Théodore Aboucara évêque d'Haran* (Beyrouth, 1904); *idem*, *Un traité des œuvres arabes de Théodore Abou-Kurra, évêque de Haran* (Tripoli de Syrie and Rome, 1905); Georg GRAF, *Die arabischen Schriften des Theodore Abû Qurra, Bischofs von Ḥarrân (ca. 740-820)* (Forschungen zur christlichen Literatur- und Dogmengeschichte, X. Band. 3/4 Heft; Paderborn, 1910); Louis CHEIKHO, «Mīmar li Tadūrus Abī Qurrah fī wuğūd al-ḫāliq wa d-dīn al-qawīm», *al-Machriq* 15 (1912), pp. 757-774, 825-842; Georg GRAF, *Des Theodor Abû Kurra Traktat über den Schöpfer und die wahre Religion* (Beiträge zur Geschichte der Philosophie des Mittelalters. Texte und Untersuchungen, Band XIV, Heft I; Münster i. W., 1913); Ignace DICK, «Deux écrits inédits de Théodore Abuqurra», *Le Muséon* 72 (1959), pp. 53-67; Sidney H. GRIFFITH, «Some Unpublished Arabic Sayings Attributed to Theodore Abū Qurrah», *Le Muséon* 92 (1979), pp. 29-35. For Abū Qurrah's works preserved only in Greek, cf. J.P. MIGNE, *Patrologiae Cursus Completus, Series Graeca* (161 vols. in 166; Paris, 1857-1887), vol. 97, cols. 1461-1610. For a recent general study on Abū Qurrah, cf. Ignace DICK, «Un continuateur arabe de saint Jean Damascène: Théodore Abuqurra, évêque melkite de Harran», *Proche-Orient Chrétien* 12 (1962), pp. 209-223, 319-332; 13 (1963), pp. 114-129. For Abū Rāʾiṭah, cf. Georg GRAF, *Die Schriften des Jacobiten Ḥabīb Ibn Ḥidmah Abū Rāʾiṭa* (CSCO, vols. 130 & 131; Louvain, 1951), and Sidney H. GRIFFITH, «Ḥabīb ibn Ḥidmah Abū Rāʾiṭah, A Christian *Mutakallim* of the First Abbasid Century», *Oriens Christianus* 64 (1980), pp. 161-201.

the year 1298[6]. To date, no translations of ʿAmmār's works into a western language have appeared.

The threefold purpose of the present article is very briefly to state what is known about ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī and to describe his two known works; to present an interpretive outline of his *Kitāb al-burhān*, as an example of a genre of Christian apologetical literature that seems to have come into vogue in the first Abbasid century; and finally to consider ʿAmmār and his work against the background of the Nestorian intellectual tradition in which he participated.

I. ʿAMMĀR, THE CONTROVERSIALIST

As Michel Hayek has explained in the introduction to his edition of ʿAmmār's works, we owe their preservation to the industry of Coptic scholars working in Cairo in the thirteenth century. Until recently, in fact, it was thought that ʿAmmār himself lived not in the first Abbasid century, but somewhere between the tenth and the thirteenth centuries. Georg Graf proposed this vague range of dates for the apologist because the Coptic bibliographer, Abū Isḥāq ibn al-ʿAssāl, had put ʿAmmār last in his list of Nestorian writers, after Ḥunayn ibn Isḥāq (808-873/7). So Graf could point only to the several centuries between Ḥunayn and the date when the British Museum Arabic MS 801 was copied for the chronological framework within which ʿAmmār's lifespan should be located[7].

It is from the recently published pages containing the lists of the Muʿtazilite scholars and their writings, long lost from modern editions of Ibn an-Nadīm's *Fihrist*, that one learns that ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī was a contemporary of the *mutakallim*, Abū l-Hudhayl al-ʿAllāf (d.c. 840). The *Fihrist* reports that among Abū l-Hudhayl's writings is a tract entitled *Kitāb ʿalā ʿAmmār an-naṣrānī fī r-radd ʿalā n-naṣārā*[8]. And from ʿAmmār's own *Kitāb al-burhān*, as shall appear below, one learns that the Islamic thesis regarding the stature of the *ṣifāt Allāh*, which

[6] Michel HAYEK, *ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, apologie et controverses* (Beyrouth, 1977). Cf. the author's French introduction to his edition of ʿAmmār's works, reprinted in *Islamochristiana* 2 (1976), pp. 69-113 (citat.: HAYEK).

[7] Cf. Georg GRAF, «Das Schriftstellerverzeichnis des Abû Isḥâq ibn al-ʿAssâl», *Oriens Christianus* n.s. 2 (1912), pp. 216-217, 222; *idem*, *Geschichte der christlichen arabischen Literatur* (vol. II, Studi e Testi, 133; Città del Vaticano, 1947), pp. 210-211 (citat.: *GCAL*).

[8] J.W. FÜCK, «Some Hitherto Unpublished Texts on the Muʿtazilite Movement from Ibn al-Nadīm's Kitāb al-Fihrist», in S.M. ABDULLAH (ed.), *Professor Muḥammad Shafiʿ Presentation Volume* (Lahoreu 1955), pp. 57-58 (citat.: *Some*); DODGE, vol. I, p. 388. Cf. H.S. NYBERG, «Abu ʾl-Hudhayl al-ʿAllāf», *EI*², vol. I, pp. 127-129.

'Ammār chooses to refute at some length, is precisely the one espoused by Abū Hudhayl, his fellow Baṣrian[9]. Furthermore, from an event which 'Ammār mentions in passing in his *Kitāb al-burhān*, Hayek has been able to argue convincingly that the book must have been written not long after the caliph al-Mu'taṣim's (833-842) campaign against Amorium[10]. Therefore, there can be no doubt about the fact that 'Ammār al-Baṣrī followed his career as a Christian *mutakallim* during the first half of the ninth century, in the company of the other Christian Arabic writers : Theodore Abū Qurrah, Ḥabīb ibn Ḥidmah Abū Rā'iṭah, and Ḥunayn ibn Isḥāq; along with the Syriac writers : Theodore bar Kônî and the patriarch Timothy I, who were Nestorians, and the Jacobite, Nonnus of Nisibis[11]. All of these Christian apologists, and more, were active during the first Abbasid century, and their common aim was to commend the tenets of Christianity to their co-religionists and to interested Muslims, in language that reflects the intellectual concerns of the contemporary Muslim *mutakallimūm*. In the exchange, Abū Qurrah, like 'Amār al-Baṣrī, drew by name the counterfire of a

[9] Sidney H. Griffith, «The Concept of *al-uqnūm* in 'Ammār al-Baṣrī's Apology for the Doctrine of the Trinity», *Actes du premier Congrès Internat. d'études arabes chrét.* Goslar, Septembre 11-13, 1980, *Orientalia Christiana Analecta*, Rome, 1982, p. 169-191.

[10] Cf. Hayek, pp. 19-20.

[11] For Ḥunayn's apology, cf. Louis Cheikho, *Vingt traités théologiques* (Beyrouth, 1920), pp. 143-146; and Paul Sbath, *Vingt traités philosophiques et apologétiques d'auteurs arabes chrétiens du IXe au XIVe siècle* (Cairo, 1929), pp. 181-185. A full edition of Ḥunayn's apology is to appear, cf. Samir Khalil & Paul Nwiya, *Patrologia Orientalis* 40, no. 183. Cf. also Rachid Haddad, «Ḥunayn ibn Isḥāq Apologiste Chrétien», *Arabica* 21 (1974), pp. 292-302; Paul Nwiya, «Un dialogue islamo-chrétien au IXe siècle», *Axes* 9 (1976-1977), pp. 7-11.

For the Syriac writers, cf. the following works : Addai Scher, *Theodorus bar Kônî Liber Scholiorum* (CSCO, vols. 55 & 69; Paris, 1910 & 1912) (citat.: *Theodorus*). Chapter ten is in vol. 69, pp. 231-284. Cf. also Sidney H. Griffith, «Chapter Ten of the *Scholion*: Theodore bar Kônî's Anti-Muslim Apology for Christianity», *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 47 (1981), pp. 158-188; and «Theodore bar Kônî's *Scholion*, a Nestorian *Summa Contra Gentiles* from the First Abbasid Century», Dumbarton Oaks Symposium, May 9-11, 1980, *East of Byzantium: Syria and Armenia in the Formative Period*, (Washington, 1982), pp. 53-72. A. Mingana, «Timothy's Apology for Christianity», *Woodbrooke Studies* 2 (1928), pp. 1-162. Cf. the shorter Syriac rendition in A. Van Roey, «Une apologie syriaque attribuée à Elie de Nisibe», *Le Muséon* 59 (1946), pp. 381-397. For the Arabic versions, cf. Hans Putman, *L'église et l'islam sous Timothée I* (Beyrouth, 1975); Robert Caspar, «Les versions arabes du dialogue entre le Catholicos Timothée I et le calife al-Mahdi», *Islamochristiana* 3 (1977), pp. 107-175. Raphael Bidawid, *Les lettres du patriarche nestorien Timothée I* (Studi e Testi, 187; Città del Vaticano, 1956), pp. 32-33, 63. An English translation of Timothy's letter no. 40, from *MS Vat. Siriaco* 605, ff. 216v-244v, is the master's thesis of Thomas Hurst at the Catholic University of America. Washington, D.C., 1981. A. Van Roey, *Nonnus de Nisibe; Traité apologétique* (Bibliothèque du Muséon, vol. 21; Louvain, 1948).

Muslim scholar. The Mu'tazilite, 'Īsā ibn Ṣabīḥ al-Murdār (d. 840) wrote a tract against him entitled, *Kitāb 'alā Abī Qurrat an-naṣrānī*[12].

Two works by 'Ammār al-Baṣrī survive. The shortest of them, the *Kitāb al-burhān*, is the principal subject matter of the present article, and so discussion of it shall be deferred to the main body of the communication. The second, and longest, work is entitled *Kitāb al-masā'il wa l-ağwibah*, or «Book of Questions and Answers». The work is divided into four main sections, according to the topics that were the standard fare for the discussions between the Muslim and the Christian *mutakallimūn*, viz., the eternity and oneness of the Creator, and the createdness of the world; the authenticity of the Gospel; the oneness of the Creator in three hypostases; and the incarnation of the Word of God. How these topics are related to one another, and how together they composed a unified apologetical agenda for the Christian controversialists of 'Ammār's period, will appear as the analysis of the *Kitāb al-burhān* unfolds. Here it is important only to sketch a literary profile of the *Kitāb al-masā'il*, as a work of Christian theology that belongs to an identifiable intellectual tradition.

As its title indicates, the substance of the work is a sequence of questions (*masā'il*) and answers (*ağwibah*), which are arranged numerically under four topical chapter headings (*maqālāt*)[13]. The questions themselves are derived according to a logical development of the topic under each heading. For example, the eighteen questions that compose the first chapter (*maqālah*), on the pre-existence and oneness of the Creator, and the createdness of the world, proceed successively from the philosophical demonstration of the existence of a Creator (question one), to issues raised by the terms of the demonstration, e.g., the natures of the four primal elements (question two), the necessity to exclude dualism (questions three, four, five, six), the reasons for the creation of the world (question seven), and so forth. The questions and answers themselves, however, are not disposed according to the standard *Erotapokriseis* style which had become conventional in Greek, and later in Syriac, biblical and apologetical dialogues[14]. Rather, they

[12] Cf. Fück, *Some*, p. 62, and Dodge, vol. I, p. 394.

[13] The number of chapter headings (*maqālāt*) differs in the manuscript traditions. *BM Arabic MS* 801 carries a title paragraph that mentions three *maqālāt* (cf. Hayek, p. 93), while aṣ-Ṣafī ibn 'Assāl's abridgement of the work mentions four of them, as does Abū al-Barakāt's catalog of Christian Arabic writers. Cf. Hayek, p. 178, n. 1 (Arabic), and pp. 48-49 (intro.). Moreover, in *BM Arabic MS* 801, the second and third chapters are disignated bŷ the noun *al-fann* instead of *al-maqālah*. Cf. Hayek, pp. 128 & 148.

[14] Cf. G. Bardy, «La Littérature patristique des 'Quaestiones et Responsiones', sur l'écriture sainte», *Revue Biblique* 41 (1932), pp. 210-236; 42 (1933), pp. 211-229,

are phrased in the familiar, conditional style of the Islamic *ʿilm al-kalām*, with the 'question' being the protasis of the statement, and the 'answer' its apodosis, e.g., «if someone says (*in qāla qāʾil*) or asks (*in saʾala sāʾil*) such and such, we say (*qulna*) thus and so». With this rhetorical device, the writer proceeds to develop his argument in a system of consecutive dilemmas designed to thwart the views of his adversary, and to force him to conclude to the truth of the writer's thesis.

Accordingly, in the first chapter (*maqālah*) of ʿAmmār's work, the first question (*masalah*) is put as follows: «If someone of the deniers (*ahl al-ğuḥūd*) asks, 'What proof (*dalīl*) is there for the truth of what you say about the existence of the Creator, and that the world is created as a result of his work', we say, 'the proof of it is our own existence, — the world as a realm composed of mutually exclusive, different elements (*arkān*), I mean, 'earth', 'water', 'fire', and 'air'»[15]. From this point, ʿAmmār goes on to construct his argument, speaking in the first person, singular or plural, and adressing his putative adversary in the second person, almost as if his treatise were a transcript of his own *viva voce* participation in a *mağlis* of *mutakallimūn*. This almost epistolary style characterizes the *Kitāb al-masāʾil* throughout.

ʿAmmar introduces the *Kitāb al-masāʾil wa l-ağwibah* with a preface that is virtually a prayer for the reigning caliph (*amīr al-muʾminīn*), whom he does not name[16], and for himself- that he might accomplish the task before him. His view of the caliph's responsibilities, as revealed in the preface, is instructive. The *amīr al-muʾminīn* is the one who has the care of God's religion, ʿAmmār says, «to exert an effort to strengthen it, to certify the knowledge of it, to set up the argument (*al-ḥuğğah*) against those who disclaim it, or deny it, or differ from it, or turn away from it ... so that he may thereby encourage the Muslims, hold them together, scrutinize their opinions, exercise discernment, in the balance of the mind with which God has graced him, when something comes to his ears which departs from their doctrine (*kalāmahum*), or the meanings of their argumentations (*maʿānī iḥtiğāğātihim*)»[17]. ʿAmmār prays that in his own weakness and deficiency in the face of the task before him, God will encourage him «to attempt

328-352; H. DÖRRIE & H. DÖRRIES, «Erotapokriseis», in *RAC*, vol. VI, cols. 342-370; B.R. Voss, *Der Dialog in der frühchristlichen Literatur* (Studia et Testimonia Antiqua, 9; München, 1970).

[15] HAYEK, p. 95.

[16] Hayek thinks that the caliph in question may have been al-Maʾmūn (813-833), but his argument is not conclusive. Cf. *op. cit.*, pp. 17-18.

[17] HAYEK, pp. 93-94.

that for which my ability is too little, before which my power of reflection falls short of the burden that has been put upon me in this matter, to bring it to completion for the *amīr al-muʾminīn*»[18]. Then ʿAmmār states the purpose for his composition of the *Kitāb al masāʾil wa l-ağwibah*:

> What I have set out upon in this book, God strengthen and aid the *amīr al-muʾminīn*, is the advancement of argumentation concerning the Creator, be He blessed and exalted; a statement concerning the attestation of the oneness of His lordship, praise and glory be to Him, and holy be His names; the establishment of an argument against those who deny Him; and, in behalf of His economy (*litadbīrihi*), the endorsement of a proof (*burhān*), the truthfulness of which cannot be refuted, and a process of reasoning (*qiyās*), the verity of which cannot be invalidated[19].

One notices the prominence of the terms *ḥuğğah* (argument) and *iḥtiğāğ* (argumentation) in the preface, and, indeed, throughout ʿAmmār's two works. The term is actually well placed in apologetical contexts. It appears already in the *Qurʾān* to designate the argumentative process that is often attendant upon the call to religion. According to *al-Anʿām* (6):149, for example, the 'conclusive argument' (*al-ḥuğğah al-bālighah*) in behalf of the right religion belongs to God. It consists in the signs (*ayāt*) that are the verses of His speech in the *Qurʾān*, sent down in clear Arabic language (cf. *al-Ğāthiyyah* (45):25). In Islamic *Kalām* texts, the term *al-ḥuğğah* means a «dialectical proof», or «the dialectical argument that confounds and convinces an opponent»[20]. So it is clear that ʿAmmār intended his work to play a role in the well known intellectual arena in which the Muslim *mutakallimun* were also active.

Hayek argues that ʿAmmār's prefatory dedication of his work to the caliph, as if in composing it he were complying with an official request, was a ploy on the author's part «to assure himself of a *captatio benevolentiae* from the Muslim reader»[21]. However, since such dedications were conventional also among Muslim scholars, one may just as well understand it to be an intentional bid on ʿAmmār's part to be taken seriously as a participant in the ongong dialogue of the *mutakallimūn*. One gathers as much from his statement of the book's purpose. His concern with demonstrating the existence and

[18] *Ibid.*, p. 94.

[19] *Ibid.*, pp. 94 & 95.

[20] L. GARDET, «Ḥudjdja», *EI²*, vol. III, pp. 543-544.

[21] HAYEK, p. 17.

oneness of the Creator, along with the presentation of arguments geared to refute 'deniers' (*ahl-al-ǧuḥūd*), certainly accords with similar concerns on the part of the contemporary Mu'tazilite *mutakallimūn*[22]. It is when he comes to his reasoning about God's economy (*at-tadbīr*), as revealed in the divine scriptures, that 'Ammār launches into his specifically Christian apology. He attempts to show that the basic Christian doctrines are logically consequent upon the conclusions he reached earlier, in the first part of his treatise. There is no reason to doubt that with this methodology, 'Ammār was attempting to commend belief in Christianity, in the scholarly idiom of his time, to the intellectuals who were the adepts in the Islamic *'ilm al-kalām*.

It is clear that the structure of 'Ammār's *Kitāb al-masā'il* owes much to the usages that were cultivated in the Syriac, Nestorian school system. The practice of composing 'books of questions» (*kᵉtābê dᵉšû'âlê*), for example, was a conventional manner of scholarly composition in Nestorian academic circles[23]. And such books were commonly divided into 'chapters' called *mêmrê* in Syriac, a term that in this particular usage corresponds to the sense of the Arabic term *maqālāt*, as it is used to designate the sections of 'Ammār al-Baṣrī's *Kitāb al-masā'il*. However, the Syriac manuals of this sort were generally arranged in the more straight forward *Erotapokriseis* format, familiar from Greek dialogues between master and pupil, than in the conversational style of Arabic *Kalām* texts. Nevertheless, there are traces of this style in Syriac works as well. Sections of Theodore bar Kônî's *Scholion*, for example, are carried along with the simple phraseology, «if they

[22] Cf. Joseph VAN ESS, «Early Islamic Theologians on the Existence of God», in Khalil I. SEMAAN (ed.), *Islam and the Medieval West, Aspects of Intercultural Relations* (Albany, N.Y., 1980), pp. 64-81; PINES, «Some Traits of Christian Theological Writing ...», *Proceedings of the Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities*, 5 (1976), pp. 112-118.

[23] Cf., e.g., Theodore bar Kônî's statement that he named his textbook '*Scholion*', in order to distinguish it from other «books of Questions». Addai SCHER, *Theodorus Bar Kônî, Liber Scholiorum* (CSCO, 55 & 69; Paris 1910 & 1912), vol. 55, p. 7. Cf. also Sidney H. GRIFFITH, «Theodore bar Kônî's *Scholion*, a Nestorian *Summa contra Gentiles* from the First Abbasid Century», *art. cit.* Theodore defines a 'Question' (*šû'âlâ*) as «a statement the seeks a reply» (cf. SHER, vol. 69, p. 48), and he proceeds to disignate two kinds of 'Questions', the question posed in a dialectical way, after the manner of a master (*dārôšā'īt*), and the question put in the learner's style, after the manner of a pupil (*yālôpā'īt*). This distinction corresponds somewhat to the Greek rhetorical distinction between an apology conducted διαλεκτικῶς, and one pursued ἀποδεικτικῶς. Cf. Abū Qurrah's mention of this distinction in his Greek *opusculum* 34, *PG*, vol. 97, col. 1585. Clearly, the Syriac term *šû'âlâ*, for Bar Kônî and the Nestorian academic tradition, has come to designate the whole process of academic inquiry into any stated issue.

ask, ..., we answer» style, as opposed to the more formal method of textual exposition employed in the major portions of the book, where the 'Questions' and 'Answers' are marked off in a catechetical manner[24]. Michael Cook has found examples of this conversational style in earlier Syriac texts as well, and he has proposed that it may be the ancestor of the distinctive rhetorical form of the Arabic *'ilm al-kalām*[25]. Other scholars trace the development of this style back to the methods of Greek rhetorical education in pre-Islamic Syria, in which the dialectical practices of the ecclesiastical and philosophical controversies of earlier times would have been transmitted to the Near East[26].

A very interesting Muslim text from the ninth century carries some unexpected testimony not only to the influence of Christian Arabic writers on their Muslim contemporaries, but it documents the awareness on the part of at least one Muslim writer of the fact that the Syriac speaking scholars of the Nestorian community were intentionally transmitting an ecclesiastical philosophy that was first systematized in Greek. The text in question is the *Kitab al-'ibar wa l-i'tibār*, a treatise on the existence of the Creator, and the createdness of the world, and the oneness of God, attributed to 'Amr ibn Baḥr al-Ǧāḥiẓ (d. 869), a Mu'tazilite in religion, and a famous Arabic *littérateur*[27]. The work has never been published, and its authenticity has been questioned by Charles Pellat, the most prominent modern scholar of the works of al-Ǧāḥiẓ[28]. Nevertheless, the striking fact for the present purpose is that in the introduction, the author of the treatise traces the history of the genre of religious literature with which he is dealing[29]. He is dissatisfied with the previous efforts to compose a convincing treatise on the subject at hand. In the first place he mentions what he considers to be the defective work of Ǧibrīl ibn Nuḥ al-Anbārī, a Nestorian writer in Arabic like 'Ammār al-Baṣrī, of uncertain date but definitely prior to the eleventh century, since al-Bīrūnī refers to his

[24] Cf., e.g., the sections added to chapter 9 of the *Scholion*, SCHER, *Theodorus*, vol. 69, pp. 219-230.

[25] Cf. M.A. COOK, «The Origins of Kalām», *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 43 (1980), pp. 32-43.

[26] Look for the future publication of the research of F.W. Zimmerman, of Oxford's Oriental Institute, on this theme.

[27] Cf. H.A.R. GIBB, «The Argument from Design, a Mu'tazilite Treatise Attributed to al-Jāḥiẓ», in S. LOWINGER & J. SOMOGYI, *Ignace Goldziher Memorial Volume* (Part I; Budapest, 1948), pp. 150-162 (citat.: *The Argument*).

[28] Ch. PELLAT, «Ǧāḥiẓiana III. Essai d'inventaire de l'œuvre Ǧāḥiẓienne», *Arabica* 3 (1956), p. 159.

[29] Cf. the English translation of the introductory passage in GIBB, *The Argument*, pp. 153-154.

work[30]. And, if al-Ǧāḥiẓ is actually the author of the *Kitāb al-ʿibar*, then Ǧibrīl must also have lived during the first Abbasid century. At any rate, the author of the *Kitāb al-ʿibar* goes on to say that he is not only dissatisfied with Ǧibrīl's work, but also with the earlier works of Diodore of Tarsus and Theodoretus of Cyrrhus, both of whose works, he says, had been originally written in Greek and later translated into Syriac, and ultimately into Arabic! There could be no more explicit a statement of the intellectual pedigree of a Nestorian scholar of the ninth century than this one, unless it would be to mention Theodore of Mopsuestia and Nestorius himself. Moreover, the fact that this information is conveyed in a Muslim's treatise testifies to the impact of Christian scholar's such as ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī and Ǧibrīl ibn Nuḥ al-Anbārī on the intellectual life of their time, be it Christian or Muslim.

ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī's *Kitāb al-masāʾil wa l-aǧwibah*, therefore, must be seen against the background of a long intellectual tradition, transmitted to ʿAmmār through the well developed Nestorian school system, as well as in the context of the intellectual concerns of the Islamic, Arabic *ʿilm al-kalām*. In fact, ʿAmmār's book is an attempt, for apologetical purposes, to translate the Christian worldview of the former system of thought into the scholastic idiom of the new, Islamic science, that was only beginning to elaborate its own distinctive philosophy in ʿAmmār's day. Systematically, and philosophically, the Islamic *Kalām* came into full flower only in the generation following ʿAmmār's lifetime. And its terms and concepts reflected a very different cast of mind from that which is characteristic of ʿAmmār's essentially Greek ecclesiastical philosophy. But in the beginning, ʿAmmār, and other Christian apologists such as Abū Qurrah and Abū Rāʾiṭah, and others, attempted to argue that only the Christian system of thought could logically solve the dilemmas faced by the Muslim *mutakallimūn*.

ʿAmmār's *Kitāb al-masāʾil* was a serious bid to dialogue with Muslim intellectuals, composed realistically, no doubt, with a view to a largely Christian readership. The *Kitāb al-burhān*, on the other hand, is a tract with a more pratical and popular purpose, and it is to this work, set against the background of the more ambitious intellectual project, that attention must now be turned as the main concern of the present study.

[30] Cf. Graf, *GCAL*, vol. II, p. 155.

II. The *Kitāb al-burhān*

In the *Qurʾan* there is the record of God's instruction to Muḥammad, in reference to his dealings with the religious claims of Jews and Christians, to say to them, «Produce your proof (*burhānakum*) if you are people who speak the truth» (*al-Baqarah* (2):111). It is not unlikely that it is because of the influence of this phrase, which is repeated four times in the *Qurʾān* in several different contexts, that the title *Kitab al-burhān* was a popular one among Christian apologists for their treatises in Arabic[31]. In ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī's case, his work that goes under this title is an apologetical pamphlet which goes beyond the merely intellectual or doctrinal concerns of his *Kitāb al-masāʾil wa l-aǧwibah*. The *Kitāb al-burhān* contains an abbreviated statement of the author's arguments concerning the existence and oneness of God, the authenticity of the Gospel, the doctrines of the Trinity and the Incarnation, and goes on to provide answers to some common Muslim objections to various Christian practices and popular beliefs. The author quite obviously considers the pamphlet to be a compendium of ready reference for Christians who are involved in religious controversy with Muslims on a day to day basis.

Not only ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, but also Theodore Abū Qurrah and Ḥabīb ibn Ḫidmah Abū Rāʾiṭah composed seprate pamphlets, in a popular vein, based on their own more academic treatises, to meet the practical, pastoral needs of Christians who were in frequent debate with Muslims over the discernment of the true religion. Theodore Abū Qurrah's treatise in this genre is entitled, «Treatise on the Existence of God and the True Religion»[32]. Abū Rāʾiṭah's treatise, which is incomplete in the form in which it has survived, is named «Epistle on the Confirmation of the Christian Religion, and the Confirmation of the Holy Trinity»[33]. As in the instance of ʿAmmār's pamphlet, those of Abū Qurrah and Abū Rāʾiṭah discuss not only the major Christian

[31] Cf. the list of seven other Christian Arabic writers who composed treatises under the same name, in Hayek, pp. 32-33.

[32] Louis Cheikho, «Mīmar li Tadūrūs Abī Qurrah fī wuǧūd al-ḫāliq wa d-dīn al-qawīm», *al-Machriq* 15 (1912), pp. 757-774; 825-842. Cf. the German translation by Georg Graf, *Des Theodor Abū Ḳurra Traktat über den Schöpfer und die wahre Religion* (Münster i. W., 1913). Cf. also the representation of the manuscript of this work, with a French translation, in the doctoral dissertation of Ignace Dick, «Théodore Abuqurra; évêque melkite de Ḥarrān (750?-825?); introduction générale, texte et analyse du traité de l'existence du créateur et de la vraie religion», Unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Université Catholique de Louvain, 1960.

[33] Graf, *Die Schriften...*, *op. cit.*, vol. 130, pp. 131-159; vol. 131, pp. 159-194.

doctrines, but they include answers to questions about popular Christian religious practices such as facing east in prayer, the veneration of the cross, and Christian ethical principles.

A. *The Status Quaestionis*

It is Abū Qurrah who formulates most concretely the religious dilemma that must have faced many thinking persons of the first Abbasid century, and in the process of describing it, he sets up the framework of thought within which all three of the apologists hoped to demonstrate that Christianity is the only credible religion. First of all, Abū Qurrah addresses himself to the standard issues in much of the *Kalām* of the day, be it Christian or Muslim; viz., the existence of the Creator, His oneness, the createdness of the world, and the notion that the Creator must have revealed to His creatures, through the intermediacy of a messenger with a scripture, the religion according to which He wishes to be worshipped.

The problem, according to Abū Qurrah, consists in determining which contemporary group of religious people, with their prophet and their scripture, have the true religion. He describes nine such groups as active in his own day: the ancient pagans, by whom he means the pagan Ḥarrānians, or 'Sabaeans', the Maǧūs, the Samaritans, the Jews, the Christians, the Manichaeans, the Marcionites, the followers of Bar Dayṣān, and the Muslims[34]. The program of investigation, according to Abū Qurrah, is then to recognize (*ʿarafa*) whose message is actually from God, to accept it (*qabila*), and to assert that everything contained in it is true (*ṣaddaqa*)[35].

Abū Qurrah's treatise, of. course, goes on to propose his own arguments in favor of Jesus, the Gospel, and the Christian church. ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, in his *Kitāb al-burhān*, likewise develops a course of argumentation in favor of Christianity, within the framework of the *status quaestionis* as Abū Qurrah has set it up, and with the same presuppositions. But, ʿAmmār's arguments are also distinctively his own, and they are much more attuned to the concerns of the Muslim *mutakallimūn* than are those of Abū Qurrah. It remains only to outline his *Kitāb al-burhān*, and to chart the course of his attempts to argue

[34] Cf. CHEIKHO, *Mimar*..., pp. 766-770. Abū Qurrah's description of the tenets of the nine groups is interesting. Cf. the discussion in Sidney H. GRIFFITH, «The Controversial Theology of Theodore Abū Qurrah (c. 750-820 A.D.); a Methodological, Comparative Study in Christian Arabic Literature», Unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Washington, The Catholic University of America, 1978, pp. 231-244.

[35] CHEIKHO, *Mimar*..., p. 837.

that the doctrines of Christianity are the only real solutions to the intellectual problems that were currently under discussion among the Muslim scholars.

B. *Format and Structure of the* Kitāb al-burhān

In his catalog of Christian writings in Arabic, the Coptic scholar, Šams ar-Riʾāsah Abū l-Barakāt ibn Kabar (d. 1325), listed ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī's *Kitāb al burhān* with the expanded title, *Kitāb al-burhān* ... *ʿalā siyāqat at-tadbīr al-ilāhī*, or «The Book of the Proof of the Unfolding of the Divine Economy»[36]. This addition to the title accurately identifies ʿAmmār's basic agenda in the pamphlet, and it highlights the organizing principle that guided its composition.

In this context, the Arabic term *at-tadbīr* designates the Greek theological concept of the divine economy (οἰκονομία), indicating the divine dispensation in creation and the providential ordering of the world, which, according to the Christian claim, is first revealed in the Old Testament, as interpreted in the light of the Gospel and the New Testament (cf. Ephesians 3:9). It includes, of course, the events in the life of Christ that are presented in the doctrines of the Incarnation and the Redemption, and even the sacramental life of the church[37]. It is the master concept of ʿAmmār's theological system. In general, the Arabic word *at-tadbīr*, «to administer, to manage», which appears numerous times in the pamphlet, approximates the basic meaning of the Greek term οἰκονομία[38]. In Syriac, the term *m^edabb^erānûtâ* is used to express the same concept, and it was probably this Syriac word that originally prompted the first Christian writers in Arabic to choose the cognate Arabic word, *at-tadbīr*, to designate the divine economy.

It is tempting also to draw a comparison between the Christian concept of the divine economy of salvation, God's basic plan for the world as revealed in the scriptures, and the Islamic concept of the

[36] Wilhelm RIEDEL, «Der Katalog der christlichen Schriften in arabischer Sprache von Abu ʾl Barakāt», *Nachrichten der K. Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften zu Göttingen. Philogisch-historische Klasse* 5 (1902), p. 650. Riedel's entry, which reads «... *burhān fī d-dīn ʿalā* ...», is to be corrected on the basis of Samir Ḫalīl's edition of Abū l-Barakāt's catalog (Cairo, 1971, p. 298), cf. HAYEK, p. 7 (Arabic intro.), n. 3.

[37] Cf. the range of meanings under οἰκονομία in G.W.H. LAMPE, *A Patristic Greek Lexicon* (Oxford, 1961), pp. 941-942. For some bibliog., cf. Y. CONGAR, «Économie», *Catholicisme hier, aujourd'hui, demain*, vol. III, cols. 1305-1307.

[38] Cf. Georg GRAF, *Verzeichnis arabischer kirchlicher Termini* (2nd ed., CSCO 147; Louvain, 1954), p. 45.

amr Allāh, i.e., God's ordering of creation to its intended end, which the *Qur'ān* says that God administers (*yudabbiru*) from His throne (cf., e.g., *Yūnus* (10):3)[39]. Here is not the place to pursue the comparison, except to point out that the differences between Islam and Christianity which 'Ammār highlights in his pamphlet are precisely the different conceptions of God's administration of His creation. Methodologically, 'Ammār proceeds to defend the Biblical view of God's plan for creation, over against the *Qur'ānic* view.

The basic structure of the *Kitāb al-burhān* is determined by the twelve topics to which 'Ammār directs his attention. In the form in which it has been preserved in the manuscript tradition, the first leaves of the work are missing, which presumably contained a preface in which 'Ammār explained his purpose for composing the book, and the concept which dictated the sequence of topics. As it is, one must suppose that he arranged the twelve topics first of all to suit the Christian conception of the unfolding of the divine economy of salvation, the very compass of ideas for which he is offering a defense; and secondly to initiate his apologetic program with the progression of customary topics in *Kalām* works composed by Muslim *mutakallimūn*, as he also did in the *Kitāb al-masā'il wa l-aǧwibah*, in order to take full advantage of whatever persuasiveness he may be able to wring from his contribution to the solution of dilemmas shared by both Christians and Muslims.

The twelve topics are: confirming the existence of God, proofs of the true religion, reasons for accepting Christianity, a refutation of the suspicion of distorting the scriptures (*at-taḥrīf*), a discourse on the Trinity, a statement (*qawl*) on the divine unity, confirming the Incarnation, a statement on the crucifixion, a statement on baptism, a statement on the eucharistic liturgy, a discourse (*kalām*) about the cross, and a discourse about eating and drinking in the next world. These titles for the topics which 'Ammār discusses, in this order in his *Kitāb al-burhān*, come directly, not from 'Ammār's own pen, but from the several editors of the text, both medieval and modern. Nevertheless, they adequately reflect the course of 'Ammār's thinking as he unfolds it in the book.

What one notices immediately in this sequence of titles is the standard outline of the subjects of controversy between Muslims and Christians as they are discussed in most of the apologetical tracts

[39] Cf. J.M.S. BALJON, «The 'Amr of God in the Koran», *Acta Orientalia* 23 (1959), pp. 7-18.

that appeared in the first Abbasid century. For example, the same list of topics, with just a few variations, appears in Abū Rā'iṭah's general apology for Christianity, and in chapter ten of Theodore bar Kônī's *Scholion*, which is itself a separable apologetic tract[40]. Theodore Abū Qurrah's pamphlet, on the other hand, omits the practical issues such as Baptism, Eucharist, and the cross, and concentrates more on ethical principles. But this variation is not a real departure from the standard apologetical outline, since Abū Qurrah takes up the argument in favor of these same issues in everyday religious practice in a separate treatise, «On Bowing Down to the Images of Christ and His Saints»[41].

'Ammār's style in the *Kitāb al-burhān* is discursive, but less formally arranged then in the *Kitāb al-masā'il*. He speaks most often in the first person plural, presenting his arguments against adversaries who are designated only as «those who disagree with us» (*man ḫālafanā*, *muḫālifūnā*). However, there is no doubt that the Muslims are the disagreeing partners in the discussion. For, 'Ammār regularly takes issue with distinctively Islamic points of view. He quotes regularly from the *Qur'ān*, refers to standard Islamic beliefs and practices, and alludes to positions adopted by Muslim *mutakallimūn*, especially the Mu'tazilites, to the point that Abū Huḏhayl felt compelled to address a separate treatise against 'Ammār an-Naṣrānī.

C. *'Ammār's Apologetical Argumentation*

The most intelligible way to describe 'Ammār's apologetical methodology is to review the main points of his argument under each one of the twelve topics which he discusses in the *Kitāb al-burhān*. Since Michel Hayek has already given a *précis* of the argument under each heading, in his French introduction to the edition of 'Ammār's two known treatises, there is no need to repeat it here. Rather, the present review will highlight 'Ammār's references and allusions to Islam, the *Qur'ān*, and the characteristic doctrines of the Muslim *mutakallimūn*. The purpose of the review is twofold: first, to call attention to 'Ammār's informed knowledge of Islam, and contemporary Islamic intellectual life; and secondly, to highlight the kinds of Christian intellectual pressure that doubtless gave the impetus, in some part

[40] SCHER, *Theodorus*, vol. 69, pp. 231-284. Cf. Sidney H. GRIFFITH, «Chapter Ten of the *Scholion*: Theodore bar Kônī's Anti-Muslim Apology for Christianity», *Orientalia Christiana Periodica*, 47 (1981), pp. 158-188.

[41] Cf. ARENDZEN, *Theodori Abū Ḳurra de cultu imaginum* ..., *op. cit.*, and GRAF, *Die arabischen Schriften* ..., *op. cit.*, pp. 278-333.

at least, to the development of the highly distinctive system of religious thought which was elaborated by the Muslim *mutakallimūn* of ʿAmmār's age, and later. It is not completely improbable, for example, that the fairly consistent Christian ecclesiastical philosophy, once it found its Arabic tongue, was one of the circumstances that favored the development of an equally consistent *Kalām* system of thought among the Muslims. An alternative system of reasoning would have been required if the Muslim discussants were to escape the logical traps and dilemmas laid for them by their Christian dialectical partners.

1) *Confirming the Existence of God*

ʿAmmār's argument in confirmation of the existence of God has two parts. In the first part he very summarily claims that creation itself is the testimony to the existence of a Creator who is God. In the second part he argues that man should know that God is one because there is a general consensus among all religious groups that there is ultimately only one indescribable God.

The proof of the existence of the Creator from the testimony of creation, as ʿAmmār proposes it, is basically the argument that there is discernible in creation an economy, or a plan, or a design, that can only be due to a Creator, i.e., «the divine economy» (*tadbīr al-ḫāliq*). The evidence that ʿAmmār adduces for the existence of such a design is man's existential dread in the face of the hostile forces in the world, and principally the threat of death. As ʿAmmār sees it, the fact that man's life is not instantly overcome by all of these forces, beginning with the mutual antipathies of the four basic elements and the hostility of predatory beasts, is the clearest indication that there is a Creator who has a design for the world. While man's pleasures in life are bodily, and evanescent, ʿAmmār argues, the liabilities of life in this world are such that they «give shape to his soul, and motivate him to seek a world in which there is nothing harmful or unpleasant. And they arouse in him an aversion for this world because of the harm it brings upon him»[42]. Therefore, ʿAmmār implies, there is a Creator who has provided a permanent world for man, in which he may find the fulfillment of his deepest tendencies.

So, in several short paragraphs, ʿAmmār dismisses an intellectual problem that occupies pages in the works of many Muslim *mutakallimūn*, and indeed in his own *Kitāb al-masāʾil wa l-ağwibah*. But the *Kitāb al-burhān* is a practical pamphlet, for use in controversies with Muslims

[42] HAYEK, p. 22.

on a day to day basis. The existence of God is really assumed. ʿAmmār's main concern here is to introduce the concept of the divine economy in a manner that will support the views that he will later extract from the scriptures, with the aid of his inherited ecclesiastical philosophy.

ʿAmmār deals equally summarily with the general consensus that God is one. His principle is that «consensus (*al-iğgimāʿ*) never deceives»[43]. He classifies the people of the world into four groups: the three greatest religions (*akbar al-milal*), Christianity, Judaism, and Islam (*al-islamiyyah*); the *mušrikūn*, the Mağūs, the *Zanādiqah*, and the Dayṣānites; the philosophers, Plato and Aristotle; and the idol worshippers (*ʿubbād al-aṣnām*). All of them, he claims, confess that there is one God. The three major religions, for all of their differences, agree that God is one (*wāḥid*). The Mağūs etc., with their two eternal beings, God and Satan, nevertheless name only one of them God. Aristotle posits one who is the cause (*ʿillah*) of all, the God who is the administrator/designer (*mudabbir*); and Plato speaks of «the images of all things that are in the knowledge (*ʿilm*) of the gestower (*al-munʿim*)[44]. The idol worshippers always say that above their idol-gods, «there is a God beyond whom there is nothing»[45]. Therefore, ʿAmmār concludes, all of these groups, without any other unity or reconciliation among themselves, «agree in asserting the oneness (*at-tawḥīd*) of the being (*al-ğawhar*) of God. So, who would be more ignorant than one who would quarrel with the consensus of the whole world, along with the testimonies of the creatures to their Creator?»[46]

2) *Proofs of the True Religion*

Since one knows of the existence of the Creator from the purposeful design of His creation, ʿAmmār reasons, the Creator must be wise (*ḥakim*), by the very evidence of the design. He must be generous (*ğawād*), because He created man without any real need for him. Since, then, the Creator is wise, even man's death must not be simply a dissolution of the man. A wise being does not make something merely to destroy it. Rather, death must be a preparation for the next life, the state

[43] *Ibid.*, p. 22.

[44] *Ibid.*, p. 23. ʿAmmār refers by name to passages in Aristotle's *De caelo et mundo*, which he calls his book *fī amr al-ʿālam wa s-samāʾ*, and to his *De generatione et corrumptione*. He does not name any works of Plato, not surprisingly, since the doctrine he mentions is Neoplatonic and not Platonic.

[45] HAYEK, p. 23.

[46] *Ibid.*

towards which man's being naturally yearns, as the Creator has made him. Accordingly, ʿAmmār argues, such a generous Creator will not have failed to send down news (*al-bušrā*) of what He has prepared for His creatures, and that in writing, a scripture (*kitāb*), to serve as an *aide-mémoire* for men, of a sort that can be bequeathed from generation to generation. It should contain the Creator's command (*amr*) and prohibition (*nahy*) for His creatures, so that by exerting effort in the life of worship (*al-iğtihād fī l-ʿibādah*), a man may achieve the happiness prepared for him by the Creator as a result of his own acquisition (*iktisāb*), since a man's joy is greatest in that which he acquires by his own desserts (*istiḥqāq*). Therefore, ʿAmmār concludes, it is clear that God should have a religion on earth which He approves for all of His creatures.

The problem, of course, is to discern which of the religions is really the true one. Each one of them claims that it is God's religion, and that its scripture contains the divine guidance (*al-hudā*). ʿAmmār's advice is as follows:

> We must put them on the same level, and beware of taking a stand on anything of theirs without the argument (*al-ḥuğğah*) seeming right to us, and that it is God's religion ... The argument for it will seem right in only one of two ways: either we see in it signs, for the like of which mankind has no power, so on their account we acknowledge it to be from God; or there is a proof of reason, the like of which cannot be falsified, about the existence of signs in it at its first appearance, even if they are absent it its period of power and stability. But, all of them, by consensus, claim this. The acceptance of the claim of any one of them rather than another is silly and *at-taqlīd*. And the acceptance of all of their claims together is impossibly absurd[47].

Evidentiary miracles, therefore, are the signs of the true religion, according to ʿAmmār. He rejects more sophisticated methods of discernment based on intellectual inquiry. Such efforts, he argues, are not only inconclusive generally, but they are beyond the abilities of most people, and God does not impose on people obligations beyond their abilities[48]. So, miracles are the only reliable signs of the true religion. But, for ʿAmmār, there is a further twist to the argument. The prophets of several religions have worked miracles. So the true religion must be only that one, endorsed by miracles, in which the inquirer can find no unworthy, earthly motives, for the sake of which one could imagine that the religion, in which one or more of the

[47] HAYEK, p. 26.

[48] ʿAmmār's phrase is: «*ta'ālā Allāh ʿan taklīf an-nās mā lā yuṭiqūn*». *Ibid.*, p. 28.

motives appear, may have prevailed in the world. In the *Kitāb al-burhān*, ʿAmmār lists five such reasons: the sword, bribes and cajolery, ethnocentricity (*al-ʿaṣabiyyah*), personal preference (*al-istiḥsān*), and tribal cohesion (*at-tawāṭuʾ*)[49].

Some pages of the *Kitāb al-burhān* are missing from this section of the work, in which ʿAmmār discusses the claims of Judaism and Islam to be the true religion. From what remains, however, it is clear that he rejects Judaism because, in his view, God «made it a particular religion, in which He did not include His whole creation»[50]. Furthermore, ʿAmmār says, elements of the five unworthy motives may be found in it.

As for Islam, ʿAmmār briefly mentions grounds for charging the first Muslims with ethnocentricity, and tribalism, but pages of the pamphlet are missing here, so his arguments remain obscure. However, the principal reason for rejecting Islam's claim to be the true religion, according to ʿAmmār, is that its own scripture rejects the notion of evidentiary miracles. He quotes a passage from *al-Isrāʾ* (17):59 to this effect, and makes an allusion to a similar teaching in *al-Anʿām* (6):109.

The citation of these passages from the *Qurʾān* reminds the reader of other words and phrases in ʿAmmār's argument that have a peculiarly Islamic ring to them. For instance, he speaks of the news (*al-bušrā*) which the Creator should send down for the guidance (*al-hudā*) of His creatures. These two terms appear in tandem in the *Qurʾān*, in *al-Baqarah* (2):97. Other phrases remind one of the concerns of the Muslim *mntakallimūn*, particularly the Muʿtazilites. The mention of the Creator's *amr* and *nahy*, or 'command' and 'prohibition', recalls the fifth principle of Muʿtazilism, 'commanding the good and forbidding the evil'[51]. The phrase, «God is above imposing on people an obligation for which they are unable», echoes the Muʿtazilite and Qadarite principle that also denies that God makes such an imposition, i.e., *taklīf bimā lā yuṭāq*[52]. And finally, ʿAmmār's rejection of *at-taqlīd*, or the uncritical acceptance of doctrines based on the authority of

[49] Cf. the discussion of this aspect of ʿAmmār's argument, and its relationship to similar arguments proposed by other Christian apologists of the time, in Sidney H. GRIFFITH, «Comparative Religion in the Apologetics of the First Christian Arabic Theologians», *Proceedings of the Patristic, Medieval, Renaissance Conference* 4 (1979), pp. 63-87.

[50] HAYEK, p. 30.

[51] Cf. William Montgomery WATT, *The Formative Period of Islamic Thought* (Edinburgh, 1973), p. 212.

[52] Cf. n. 48 above, and Josef VAN ES, «Ḳadariyya», *EI*², vol. IV, pp. 370-371.

one's teachers, appeals to a cardinal presupposition among the Mu'tazilah. Al-Ğāḥiẓ, for example, imputes precisely such uncritical faith to the Christians in the matter of their doctrine of the Incarnation [53].

3) *Reasons for Accepting Christianity*

'Ammār's reasons for accepting Christianity as the true religion are simply stated. He maintains that God endorsed Christianity by means of the miracles that He produced at the hands of the apostles, when they first preached their faith throughout the world. Moreover, he argues that no one of the earthly motives for religious conversion, that he had rehearsed earlier, can be found in the Christian religion. Christians are present everywhere, and not only in a single country, or limited to a particular language. They are widespread among peoples who are traditionally hostile to one another. The sword was not employed in the spread of Christianity, as the Jews, the Mağūs, and the Muslims will all agree, 'Ammār says. The original Christian preachers were destitute and humble. Their doctrines are such that no one would choose to believe them without some sort of divine warranty, such as the evidentiary miracles. The ethical code is such that it not only does not encourage license, but it is positively ascetic and forbidding, from the earthly point of view. Therefore, 'Ammār concludes:

> The facts compel us to dissociate Christianity from the earthly motives by reason of which other [religions] are established, in favor of the testimony that it was established by clear signs from God, and propagated among all of the different nations by reason of its reliably true distinguishing marks [54].

'Ammār makes some direct references to Islam as he recounts his reasons for accepting Christianity. He says that no one denies that both Judaism and Islam were spread by the use of the sword. «The religion of Islam», 'Ammār contends, «has not denied it. Rather, it describes its strength by reference to it, and how by its use it [i.e., Islam] conquered its domains» [55]. And in connection with his discussion of Christianity's rejection of sexual licence, 'Ammār contrasts the behavior of a certain Muslim leader with Christian attitudes. In an

[53] Cf. J. FINKEL, *Three Essays of Abū 'Othman 'Amr ibn Baḥr al-Jāḥiẓ (d. 869)* (Cairo, 1926), p. 25.

[54] HAYEK, p. 40. For more of the details of 'Ammār's arguments, cf. GRIFFITH, «Comparative Religion ...».

[55] HAYEK, pp. 33-34.

apparent reference to the caliph al-Mu'taṣim's campaign against Amorium, he speaks of «one of the kings of our own age who set out with his whole army toward the Byzantines (*ar-Rūm*), in search of a woman in one of the forts» [56].

It was perhaps in reaction to the pressure of the Christian apologists like 'Ammār, with their insistence on miracles as the signs of true prophecy, that beginning in the first Abbasid century the Muslim scholars began to pay more attention to the elaboration of the doctrine of the *iğāz al-Qur'ān*, the concept of the miraculous nature of the *Qur'ān*'s own language. According to this line of thinking, the *Qur'ān* itself is advanced as Islam's evidentiary miracle [57].

4) *Refutation of the Suspicion of* at-Taḥrīf

Already in the *Qur'ān* there are passages that charge the scripture people (*ahl al-kitāb*) with changing and distorting (*at-taḥrīf*) the words of their scriptures (cf., e.g., *al-Baqarah* (2):75, *an-Nisā'* (4):6). In the later Islamic elaboration of this charge, some scholars maintained that Jews and Christians had altered the actual text of the Torah and the Gospel respectively, while others claimed that it was a matter of their distorting the interpretation, or the meanings of the scriptural texts [58]. Already in the first Abbasid century the refutation of this charge was a standard topic in the works of the Christian apologists. In the *Kitāb al-burhān*, 'Ammār addresses himself to both of the Islamic understandings of *at-taḥrīf*.

Against the notion that Christians have altered the very words of the Gospel, 'Ammār proposes first of all the psychological argument that since the Gospel was accepted originally because of the evidentiary miracles worked by Christ and the apostles, similar testimonies would have to have been produced by those who may have wished to change its text. Furthermore, 'Ammār argues, no Christian king would have the power to enforce the alteration of the Gospel text, since the Christians

[56] *Ibid.*, p. 38. Regarding al-Mu'taṣim's reaction to the Byzantine victory at Zapetra in 837, cf. A.A. VASILIEV, *Byzance et les arabes* (4 vols.; Bruxelles, 1935-1968), vol. I, pp. 137-143.

[57] Cf. I. GOLDFELD, «The Illiterate Prophet (*Nabī Ummī*), an Inquiry into the Development of a Dogma in Islamic Tradition», *Der Islam* 57 (1980), pp. 58-67; and Richard C. MARTIN, «The Role of the Basrah Mu'tazilah in Formulating the Doctrine of the Apologetic Miracle», *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 39 (1980), pp. 175-189.

[58] Cf. I. GOLDZIHER, «Ueber muhammedanische Polemik gegen Ahl al-Kitāb», *Zeitschrift der deutschen morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 32 (1878), pp. 341-387; I. DI MATTEO, «Il taḥrīf od alterazione della Bibbia secondo i musulmani», *Bessarione* 38 (1922), pp. 64-111; 223-260.

are to be found in different, mutually hostile kingdoms, and they all have the same Gospel text in their own languages, a point that even their enemies, the Jews and the Magus concede. In response to the suggestion that the existence of the varied Christian sects, for example, the Byzantine sect (*millat ar-Rūm*), should point to the alteration of the Gospel text, ʿAmmār claims that not even the Byzantine king would have the power to enforce such an alteration. By the expression 'Byzantine sect', ʿAmmār probably means the Melkites.

He goes on from this point to develop a detailed rebuttal of the charge that the Gospel text could have been altered by imperial authority. That he does so is not surprising in view of the fact that we know that the Muslim *mutakallimūn* claimed that it was the Byzantines who distorted Jesus' Gospel message in the first place. The Muʿtazilite, ʿAbd al-Ǧabbār ibn Aḥmad al-Hamdhānī (d. 1025), for example, in his apologetic treatise, *Tathbīt dalāʾil an-nubuwwah*, summed up the Islamic arguments in support of this contention in a particularly vivid fashion[59].

An interesting polemical element in ʿAmmār's argument against the charge that Christians have altered the Gospel text is his insinuation that it is the *Qurʾān* that is actually the Gospel distorted. In reviewing the possible motives that anyone could have had for altering the text, he says:

> They could have made for themselves a scripture according to their own desires, and they could have affirmed in it that when the Jews wanted to kill Christ, and they came up to him, he blew a breath against them and consumed them with fire, and he was lifted up to heaven alive, that death did not attain him, nor did affliction come upon him; and that a man may marry as many women as he wants. They could have proscribed the affliction of their bodies with fasting, devotion to prayers, and abstention from pleasures, as the Maǧūs have done ... They could have affirmed in it what they could anticipate delightfully in the next life, marriage, eating and drinking etc.[60].

With this argument ʿAmmār is not, of course, mentioning anything that the *Qurʾān* actually teaches. Rather, he is reflecting what the Christian polemicists, especially those who wrote in Greek, charged against the *Qurʾān*[61].

[59] Cf. S.M. STERN, «ʿAbd al-Jabbār's Account of How Christ's Religion Was Falsified by the Adoption of Roman Customs», *The Journal of Theological Studies* 19 (1968), pp. 128-185.

[60] HAYEK, p. 44.

[61] Christian polemic of this sort appears as early as St. John Damascene (d. 750). Cf. Daniel J. SAHAS, *John of Damascus on Islam, the «Heresy of the Ishmaelites»*

The suspicion that ʿAmmār intended to turn the attack against the *Qurʾān*, in his defense of the Christians who faced the charge that they distorted the Gospel, is strengthened when one reads his response to those Muslims who claimed that the Christian distortion was a matter of changing the intent and the meaning of the text, without altering it outwardly. ʿAmmār contrasts what he takes to be the obvious teaching of the Gospel, endorsed by the divine evidentiary miracles, with what he finds in the *Qurʾān*, and in the teachings of the Muslim *mutakallimūn*. He sets up his argument as follows:

> The Gospel commands that we baptize people in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. It reports that the Word is eternal, and is God, by which everything was created, that the Spirit is the Lord, and that there is no marrying, and no eating and drinking in the next life, and other things that it would be too long to mention. This and more like it is in the Gospel, verbatim, without interpretation (*taʾwīl*). Look to see, is there anything to agree with it in your scripture[62]?

Following this agenda, ʿAmmār proceeds to quote passages from *Maryam* (19):90-91, to show that the *Qurʾān* denies a son (*walad*) to *ar-Raḥmān*, and *al-Māʾidah* (5):18, which disputes the claims of Jews and Christians to be loving sons of God. He points out that the *Qurʾān* effectively denies the Father in denying the Son, and he quotes a phrase from *al-Isrāʾ* (17):85, according to which the Spirit is «*min amr ar-rabb*», and he says, «so you say that it is 'from' the Lord, but God's scripture says that it is the Lord. And regarding the Word (*al-kalimah*), you say that it is created (*maḫlūqah*), but the Gospel says that it is eternal, and is God[63]». It is clear that here ʿAmmār has the Muʿtazilite idea of God's word in mind.

At the end of his section on the charge of *at-taḥrīf*, ʿAmmār closes his argument by stating that the Gospel denies what the Muslims affirm about marrying, eating, and drinking in the next life. So, ʿAmmār concludes, «How could the Gospel be directed to the meaning (*al-maʿnā*) of your scripture? That is completely impossible. Were your discourse (*kalām*) not so weak on this point, I would multiply testimonies to nullify your thesis (*qawl*). But, I shall be content with rebutting your statement alone»[64]. With this parting shot, ʿAmmār dismisses the Muslim teaching that the *Qurʾān* attests to the truth of the scripture

(Leiden, 1972). For a general discussion of Muslim views about the crucifixion, cf. Michel HAYEK, *Le Christ de l'islam* (Paris, 1959), pp. 217-238.

[62] HAYEK, p. 45.

[63] *Ibid.*, p. 45.

[64] *Ibid.*, p. 45.

that preceded it (cf. *al-Mā'idah* (5):48), and that Jesus foretold the coming of Muḥammad in the Gospel, as the Muslim interpreters of *aṣ-Ṣaff* (61):6 taught[65].

5. *Discourse on the Trinity*

ʿAmmār maintained, as do all Christians, that it is a datum of the Gospel teaching that God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. His principal task as an apologist was to explain that «to assert three» (*at-taṯlīṯ*) in description (*waṣf*) of God is logically compatible with the assertion that He is one (*at-tawḥīd*). It would be to go too far afield for the present purposes to follow ʿAmmār's argument very closely in this intricate topic. Rather, a brief sketch of his principal apologetic stratagem will be presented, along with a statement of his conclusions[66].

The *Qur'ān* explicitly enjoins the scripture people not to say 'three' in their talk about God (*an-Nisā'* (4):171), and it states that «they have disbelieved who say that God is one of three» (*al-Mā'idah* (5):73). Muslim scholars during the first Abbasid century argued that 'to say three' manifestly contradicts saying 'one', and they contended that with their doctrine that God is one, in three divine hypostases (*aqānīm* in Arabic), the Christians should be considered to be polytheists (*al-mušrikūn*), since they believe in three gods[67].

ʿAmmār takes up his defense of the Christian doctrine on a decidedly polemical note. He says.

> Let us ask them about 'the one' (*al-wāḥid*) that is so light on their tongues ... that they might clarify what they believe on faith about Him — in the face of their divergence from the outward sense of their own words, and their transformation of the Creator, whom they say is 'living' (*ḥayy*) and 'speaking' (*nāṭiq*), into an inanimate being having no life (*ḥayyah*), and no word (*kalimah*)[68].

[65] Ibn Isḥāq (d. 767), one of the earliest biographers of the prophet, Muḥammad, quoted John 15:23-16:2 to argue that the Paraclete foretold by Jesus, was actually Muḥammad. Cf. A. GUILLAUME, *The Life of Muḥammad; a Translation of Isḥāq's Sīrat Rasūl Allāh* (Oxford, 1955), pp. 103-104.

[66] For a more detailed discussion of ʿAmmār's Trinitarian arguments, cf. Sidney H. GRIFFITH, «The Concept of *al-uqnūm* in ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī's Apology for the Doctrine of the Trinity», in *Ier Congrès des études arabes chrétiennes, Goslar*, Septembre 11-13, 1980, *Orientalia Christiana Analecta*, 1982, p. 169-191.

[67] Cf., e.g., the remarks of al-Qāsim b. Ibrāhim in I. DI MATTEO, «Confutazione contro i Christiani dello Zaydita al-Qāsim b. Ibrāhīm», *Rivista degli Studi Orientali* 9 (1921-1923), pp. 308-309.

[68] HAYEK, p. 46.

It is clear from this challenge that ʿAmmār intends to pursue his argument in the context of the current debate among the Muslim *mutakallimūn* over what one might call the ontological status of the *ṣifāt Allāh*. First, he attempts to reduce to absurdity the Muslim doctrine, and specifically the Muʿtazilite teaching espoused by Abū Huḏhayl. And then he argues that the Christian Trinitarian formula is actually the way out of the logical dilemma which the Muslim *mutakallimūn* faced.

ʿAmmār asks his putative Muslim adversary, «How, according to you, is the name (*ism*), 'the living one' (*al-ḥayy*), derived»? And he immediately answers himself, «The name, 'the living one', is derived only from life (*al-ḥayyah*). ... For we know the thing (*aš-šay'*) that is named only by what it has. And it is not named by what it does not have»[69]. With this question and answer, ʿAmmār puts his finger on precisely the Arabic grammatical presupposition which caused a problem for the Muslim *mutakallimūn*. The assumption was that verbal adjectives (*ṣifāt*) are derived from nouns, and nouns by their very nature indicate entities[70]. Accordingly, to say that God is 'living' implies that there is a reality, 'life', somehow existent in God as the real meaning, or referent (*al-maʿnā*) of the adjective 'living'. Because of this implication of the language, which would be construed to deny God's oneness, Muslim *mutakallimūn* of the stamp of Abū Huḏhayl maintained that to say that God is 'living' is to say that He has a 'life' that is He, which is simply to deny that He has death[71]. ʿAmmār pounces immediately onto this sort of a statement, «Whatever does not necessarily have life», he says, «either essential or accidental, necessarily has death, since beyond doubt death is the opposite of life»[72]. And ʿAmmār proceeds to apply the same sort of an analysis to other Qur'ānic adjectives that describe God, such as 'seeing' (*baṣīr*), and 'speaking' (*nāṭiq*) etc. 'Sight' (*baṣar*) and 'word' (*kalimah*), he points out, must be meant. To deny 'sight', for example, is to affirm its opposite, i.e., blindness, and so forth. 'Life', and 'sight', and 'word', are the referents, or the real meanings (*al-maʿānī*) of their appropriate adjectives. Without them the adjectives themselves do not

[69] *Ibid.*, p. 47.

[70] Cf. R.M. FRANK, *Beings and Their Attributes; the Teaching of the Basrian School of the Muʿtazilah in the Classical Period* (Albany, N.Y., 1978), pp. 12-14, and esp., p. 28, n. 8.

[71] Cf. the reports of Abū Huḏhayl's views in H. RITTER (ed.), *Die dogmatischen Lehren der Anhänger des Islam von Abu l-Ḥasan ʿAlī ibn Ismāʿil as-Ašʿarī* (Istanbul, 1929-1930), p. 165 (*citat.*: RITTER).

[72] HAYEK, p. 47.

apply. This premise brings ʿAmmār straight to his problem with the Muslim who espouses what one knows to have been Abū Hudhayl's position.

> Since he has fled from affirming the Word and the Spirit so that he should not be required to confess three referents (*tathlīth al-maʿānī*) in the essence of the Creator, and thereby, according to him, nullifying *at-tawḥīd*, he has fallen into the denial of the Creator and he has made Him dead, having no life and no word, like the idols that are named gods. But God in His scriptures reproaches the worship of them because people were worshipping gods having no life and no speech (*nuṭq*). While in all His scriptures, He describes himself as having a Spirit and a Word [73].

From here ʿAmmār goes on to state the Christian claim.

> Before God we are blameless of alleging three gods. Rather, by our saying Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, we want no more than to substantiate the statement that God is living (*ḥayy*), speaking (*nāṭiq*). And the Father is the one whom we consider to have life (*ḥayyah*) and word (*kalimah*). The life is the Holy Spirit, and the word is the Son. It is not like what those who differ with us ascribe to us, viz., that we fashion a female companion for God, and a son from her [74].

In the last sentence one recognizes ʿAmmār's allusion to a passage in the *Qurʾān*, «He has not taken a female companion, nor a son» (*al-Ǧinn* (72):3). And, indeed, Muslim scholars in the first Abbasid century did quote this verse in refutation of the doctrine of the Trinity [75].

ʿAmmār repeats the traditional analogies which often found a place in Christian apologies for the Trinity. They are things in human experience which, without contradiction, may be said to be 'one' and 'three' at the same time. But the original part of his argument, in the context of the Muslim *mutakallimūn* with their concern about the *ṣifāt Allāh*, is his contention that of all the attributes of God that are found in Bible or *Qurʾān*, two of them, 'living' (*ḥayy*) and 'speaking' (*nāṭiq*), designate referents (*maʿānī*), viz., 'life' (*ḥayyah*) and 'word' (*kalimah*), that are, as he says, «of the ground of the essence (*dhāt*), and of the constitution (*binyah*) of the being (*ǧawhar*)» [76] of everything. By this statement ʿAmmār means that 'life' is the attributed reality (*al-maʿnā*) that makes the difference between the animate and the inanimate, and 'speech' is the attributed reality that makes the difference between the rational and the irrational. All other attributes, such

[73] HAYEK, p. 48.
[74] *Ibid.*, pp. 48-49.
[75] So al-Qāsim ibn Ibrāhīm, in DI MATTEO, «Confutazione ...», *art. cit.*, p. 209.
[76] HAYEK, p. 52.

as 'seeing' and 'hearing', are not basic constitutive attributes of beings, and no one of them delineates another grade of being by reason of its occurrence. Rather, the occurrence of any other attribute necessarily presumes the occurrence of the essential constitutive attributes of being as the condition of its own appearance.

Next ʿAmmār reminds the reader that in describing (*waṣf*) God, who is actually beyond description, one must employ predicates which designate the highest, the noblest, and the most subtle realities, and not those which indicate the lowest, most contemptible things, or things which require other things for their own existence. Because 'life' and 'speech' are the essential constitutive attributes of being, ʿAmmār argues, «we therefore affirm in the substantial essence of the Creator (*fī dhāti l-ḫāliqi ǧawhariyyati*), 'life' (*al-ḥayyah*) and 'speech' (*nuṭq*), since we find them at the ground (*sūs*) of being» [77]. Further, ʿAmmār explains, to say that God is 'being', and 'life', and 'speech', means «that this one (*wāḥid*) eternal being (*ǧawhar*) eternally exists in three particularities (*ḫawāṣṣ*)» [78]. These particularities are the three divine hypostases (*aqānīm*) in Christian theological parlance.

An hypostasis, as ʿAmmār defines it, following the traditions of the Nestorian schools, is an individual of a given substance (*ousia/ǧawhar*), «subsisting of itself, independently of anything else» [79]. In other words, ʿAmmār agrees with the Arabic grammatical principle according to which the *ṣifāt/asmāʾ* are names which bespeak real entities in the subject of which they are predicated. Since, in this instance, God is the subject, ʿAmmār contends, one comes ultimately, by the logical process he describes, to three hypostatic entities that are particularities of the one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The Christian doctrine of the Trinity, accordingly, is held to provide the solution to the dilemma faced by the Muslim *mutakallimūn*, whom ʿAmmār pictures as casting about for solutions of a different sort, precisely to avoid the Christian doctrine of the Trinity [80].

ʿAmmār fires a parting shot at his rival, Abū Hudhayl, by accusing him of describing God's eternal essence in terms of the basest possible predicates, i.e., those which designate 'accidents', or 'powers', which

[77] *Ibid.*, p. 53.
[78] ʿAmmār says this in his *Kitāb al-masāʾil* ..., *ibid.*, p. 149.
[79] *Ibid.*, p. 51, and, in the *Kitāb al-masāʾil* ..., p. 162. Cf. Theodore bar Kônî in SCHER, *Theodorus*, vol. 55, pp. 15-16, 57.
[80] One recalls specifically that the doctrine of Ibn Kullāb, Abū Hudhayl's rival, was rejected because it seemed to be Christian. Cf. the story in Ibn an-Nadīm's *Fihrist*, DODGE, *op. cit.*, vol. I, pp. 448-449; and Ibn Kullāb's doctrine as reported by al-Ašʿarī, in RITTER, p. 169.

depend upon something else for their being. Abū Hudhayl, as al-Aš'arī reports it, said that the adjective 'knowing', for example, when applied to God, designates an 'act of knowledge' (*'ilm*) that is He[81]. 'Ammār points out that such a description of God makes Him an accident. It says that He is an accidental act of knowledge that is one, and so on down the list of divine attributes. Such a position, 'Ammār argues, is absurd along side of the Christian description of God as one being (*ǧawhar*), in three hypostases (*aqānīm*), which are, in human experience, the basic constitutive realities of all things, i.e., 'being', 'life', and 'speech'. In regard to God, these descriptions designate referents (*al-ma'ānī*) that are particularities (*ḫawāṣṣ*) which, in God, refer to subsistent hypostases, which the Gospel says are Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

6) *Statement on Divine Unity*

In this section of the *Kitāb al-burhān*, 'Ammār undertakes to explain what the Christians mean when they say that the Word of God is the Son of God, and that to say that God generates a Son is not to describe God in terms of an imperfection, or a diminution, but to ascribe to him the highest perfection of which human beings are aware. There are two quotations from the *Qur'ān* which 'Ammār uses to epitomize the Islamic objections against which he is contending. The first of them is the passage from *al-Ǧinn* (72):3, «He has not taken a female companion, nor a son», and the second one is *al-Iḫlāṣ* (112):3, «He has not generated, or has He been generated». The latter verse, like the former one, was also quoted against the Christians by the Muslim scholars of the first Abbasid century[82].

With their reference to the text from *al-Ǧinn* (72):3, 'Ammār says, the Muslim scholars have interpreted the Christian doctrine «of the manifestation of God's economy in a body from us (*ǧasad minnā*)», to mean that «we say that He took up residence in the belly of Mary, and restricted His essence (*dhāt*) to her»[83]. The whole problem here, 'Ammār contends, is that the Muslims wrongly assume, probably because of the physical aspects of generation among human beings, that the Christians are attributing bodiliness to God with their doctrine of the Incarnation. On the contrary, 'Ammār argues at some length, the

[81] *Ibid.*, p. 165.

[82] In this connection, cf. al-Qāsim ibn Ibrāhīm's commentary on each verse of *al-Iḫlāṣ* (112), in DI MATTEO, «Confutazione ...», p. 310.

[83] HAYEK, p. 36.

Christians are speaking of transcendent fatherhood and sonship, which belongs to the essential being of God, and which is not, therefore, a matter of action (*fi'l*), as among bodily human beings, but a matter of essence. Christians have learned to call the Word of God, the Son of God, from the Gospel. Should He not have a Word, 'Ammār reasons, then God would have to be said to be 'non-speaking', and 'non-knowing', an obviously unacceptable conclusion.

The mistaken Muslim interpretation of this doctrine, according to 'Ammār, springs from a misconception about God's essential names, e.g., 'living', 'wise', 'knowing', 'speaking', etc. They belong to Him primarily, and they apply to human beings, in whom one first perceives them, only because God has graced men with these names. Accordingly, 'Ammār explains about the names, «it is not legitimate for us, just because we see them as originated (*muḥdathatan*), since we are ourselves originated, to say that they belong to the Creator as originated. Rather, since they belong to the Creator in actual reality (*bil-ḥaqīqah*), and to us only on loan (*bil-isti'ārah*) from Him, we must say that they belong to Him eternally (*azaliyyatan*)»[84]. Here, of course, 'Ammār is talking about the strict meanings of words, and their metaphorical meanings. He is arguing that the Muslim *mutakallimūn* are having recourse to the wrong pole of reference in their discussions of the *ṣifāt Allāh*. The predicates should be taken to apply to God in the strict sense, and to creatures, with all of their imperfections, only metaphorically, and not the other way about. Otherwise, he seems to be saying, the creatures are taken to measure the Creator, rather than as evidences of His perfections[85]. And so, the argument is clear. One must not encumber the essential particularities (*ḫawāṣṣ*) of God's essential being, i.e., 'fatherhood', and 'sonship', with the appartenances of human, bodily generation, which bespeak imperfection.

With reference to the text from *al-Iḫlāṣ* (112):3, 'Ammār contends that to describe God as neither generating, not generated, is to impute imperfection to Him. The highest creatures, i.e., men, generate and are generated, and that according to free choice (*al-iḫtiyār*). They are the lowest things in our experience which neither generate, nor are generated, such as lifeless beings like the four basic elements. To follow the *Qur'ān*'s view, 'Ammār says, Eve, as the only ungenerated

[84] *Ibid.*, p. 59.

[85] The expression *fī l-ḥaqīqah* was a key phrase in the theories of the Muslim *mutakallimūn* about the divine attributes, and it had a variety of meanings. Cf. FRANK, *Beings and their Attributes* ..., *op. cit.*, pp. 80-81. Here 'Ammār is arguing that the Muslims apply the phrase to the wrong referents (*al-ma'ānī*) for the *ṣifāt Allāh*.

human after Adam, would be most estimable, and Satan would be greater than Abraham, *ḫalīl ar-Raḥmān* (cf. *an-Nisa`* (4):125): ʿAmmār closes the discussion by noting the willingness of Muslims to describe God in terms which denote lesser perfections among men, or even diminutions. Mercy, for exemple, implies that the heart is pained. But they deny of Him the very perfections, i.e., fatherhood, and sonship, which are actually particularities of His being, and with which He has graced His most perfect creatures, men[86].

7) *Confirming the Incarnation*

ʿAmmār's discussion of the doctrine of the Incarnation is the longest single section in the *Kitāb al-burhān*[87]. He does not attempt to prove the doctrine here. Rather, he assumes that it is the evident teaching of the Gospel that in Christ, God has manifested Himself to His creatures, in a human form. ʿAmmār first of all offers the reader four reasons (*asbāb*) for God's manifestation of Himself in this manner. He then discusses at some length, without so designating it, the Nestorian view of the Incarnation. He explains that the Incarnation is the fulfillment of God's economy, as this has been presented in the scriptures. ʿAmmār spends some pages ridiculing those who believe less noble things about God, but refuse to accept the doctrine of the Incarnation, which he presents as the fulfillment of God's magnanimity to His creatures, and as an event foretold in the Old Testament. Finally, and very briefly, he explains away the differences among Christians over the doctrine of the Incarnation.

For the purposes of the present article, the four reasons that ʿAmmār presents as convincing motives for perceiving the fulfillment of the divine economy in the Incarnation, are the most pertinent points for comment, because they are obviously addressed to Muslims. He begins by reminding the reader of a point that he had made at the beginning of the book, viz., that God created His creatures not because of any need for them, but because of His magnanimity and generosity. He then clearly states the program for his argument in defense of the doctrine of the Incarnation. Before explaining God's benefaction to His creatures in the Incarnation, ʿAmmār says, he will first recall God's past benefactions, about which «those who differ with us» will agree with us. This agreement should then become a testimony in our favor, ʿAmmār reasons, when it comes to the doctrine

[86] HAYEK, pp. 61-62.
[87] *Ibid.*, pp. 62-79.

about which they disagree with us, which we hold to be the fulfillment of God's plan to benefit His creatures. On the basis of reminding the Muslims of the beginning of God's generosity to man in the creation and thereafter, ʿAmmār hopes, he says, to provide testimony to «the similarity of the beginning in God's generosity and gracefulness, which they do not remember, to the fulness, which they deny»[88]. In other words, the Christian concept of the divine economy (*tadbīr Allāh*) is the basis of ʿAmmār's argument.

Due to God's generosity, man is the focal point of God's creation, the summation of all the natural powers on earth, and endowed with a heavenly goal in life. Because the Creator is wise, one must believe, by the force of logical necessity, ʿAmmār claims, that God will complete what He has, in His magnanimity, begun. On the basis of this premise, ʿAmmār proposes the four reasons for accepting the doctrine of the Incarnation. They are actually motives of credibility in its favor, based on what one knows of God's previous actions. First of all, he points out that God has not imprinted a knowledge of Himself in man, as He has endowed lesser creatures with the proper instincts to achieve their goals in life. Rather, so that man's praise for ordering his life to God might not be diminished, God has provided that man should achieve knowledge of Him, and of His 'command' and 'prohibition', by the exercise of his mind. But, man's mind may apprehend only that which he is able to imagine, on the basis of what his senses are able to perceive. As ʿAmmār says, «What is not imaged in the imagination, it not affirmed in the soul. And faith (*al-īmān*) in it is an extreme difficulty, which is hardly possible except by way of *kalām*, and the force of arguments (*dalā`il*), to which the senses will have led it»[89]. Accordingly, in His dealings with man, God has appeared to him in a manner which human senses could perceive. He spoke to Adam, Noah, and Abraham, according to the Torah, as a man. He spoke to Moses from a bush, and from a cloud. He spoke to the Israelites from an ark of wood, and from a house of stone, which He named His house. And even «those who differ with us», ʿAmmār reminds the reader, use human epithets of God in describing His administration of creation, and they speak of a house towards which He has ordered them to turn in prayer. This, of course, is a reference to the *Kaʿbah* in Mecca, as the *qiblah*, or the direction to which Muslims face when praying. Therefore, ʿAmmār concludes, every intelligent person who agrees with the scriptures should recognize that «God's appearance to

[88] *Ibid.*, p. 63.
[89] *Ibid.*, p. 65.

mankind in a man (*bašar*) from among them», should be the culmination of His generosity and magnanimity as revealed in the holy books. He his appeared in lesser forms, i.e., in a stone house, a wooden ark, a lowly bush, and a cloud, so He would not refuse to do the most gracious thing of all, that is to become incarnate, to appear in a man.

Secondly, ʿAmmār argues that man has an almost insatiable desire to know, to see all things, and to leave nothing hidden. People come in droves to see a prophet, for example. ʿAmmār recalls that Moses, whom he calls Mūsā ibn ʿImrān, with a nod to the *Qur'ān*, wanted to see God, and that many «who differ with us» say that they will see God on the day of the resurrection. Some people want to see God so much that they make statues and name them gods, and worship them. So, 'Ammār contends, the generous God would not be niggardly, and withhold from His creatures their security. He would appear to them in a body that is evident to the senses.

Thirdly, it is only just, ʿAmmār proposes, that one who is to be judged should see his judge. Accordingly, at the day of resurrection, God will appear to mankind in something that the human senses can perceive, since the manifestation of the divine essence as such is impossible. So, God has fashioned a veil (*ḥiǧāb*) between mankind and Himself. And there could be no more appropriate a veil than the being of a man (*ǧawhar al-insān*).

Fourthly, ʿAmmār argues that since, in His generosity, God has given mankind the dominion (*al-mulk*) and the governing power (*as-sulṭān*) over this passing world, it would be in keeping with what one knows of His economy that He would fulfill His generosity by giving man the dominion and the governing power over the everlasting world as well. This he has done, says ʿAmmār, by Himself becoming manifest in a man, who has dominion over all created things.

In the remaining pages ʿAmmār explains the doctrine of the Incarnation. The man (*al-bašar*), in whom God manifests Himself, is a man, ʿAmmār says, «whom God has fashioned from the virgin Mary without seminal substance. He converses with mankind from him, and He addresses them by means of his tongue. He becomes their companion to look at, and by means of him, He draws near to them»[90]. Further, ʿAmmār remarks in a pointedly anti-Islamic manner, in this man God summons people to a knowledge of Him, «without any messenger (*rasūl*) between himself and them»[91]. Regarding the man's

[90] HAYEK, p. 70.
[91] *Ibid.*, p. 71.

name, ʿAmmār says, «the name Christ points to the Creator and to His creation. He is the invisible Creator in His divinity, and visible as created in his humanity»[92].

Muslim scholars in the ninth century were fascinated by the differences among Christians, and they attempted to catalog them[93]. In closing his discussion of the Incarnation, ʿAmmār has the following to say about these differences. He says they concern only Christ's body.

> If they say that the Christians differ among themselves, we say, it is about the created body. Some of them name it an hypostasis, and some deny this. In regard to the Creator they do not differ. What they say about Him is 'one', 'incomprehensible'. Rather, their agreement about the Creator in His appearance in their body is greater than their agreement about the body, and so also is their statement about Him, that He is one, recognized in three hypostases, who is in every place unlimited, incomprehensible. Their disagreement about the body which they can see, to the point that some say it is an hypostasis, and others two hypostases, is over and above their agreement that that in which the Creator is made manifest is a body and a soul[94].

8) *Statement on the Crucifixion*

ʿAmmār records the Islamic disinclination to admit Christ's crucifixion (cf., e.g., *an-Nisā'* (4):157), and he rejects it as inconsistent with other aspects of Islamic thought. Then he states what he considers to be the purpose of the crucifixion in the divine economy, according to the Christian point of view.

According to ʿAmmār, in regard to the Crucifixion the Muslims of his time accused the Christians of introducing weakness into God, and diminution to Christ. «They claim against us», he said, «that we forge [lies] against God and ascribe to Him that 'on account of which the heavens are on the point of opening, and the earth is to split, and the mountains will fall down flat'»[95]. One recognizes in the last sentence the quotation from *Maryam* (19):90, which is in response to those who say that *ar-Raḥmān* has gotten a son (vs. 88). The charge that Christians «forge lies *Raḥmān* against God also reflects the *Qur'ān*'s

[92] *Ibid.*, p. 71.
[93] Abū ʿĪsā Muḥammad ibn Hārūn al-Warrāq (d. 861), for example, went to great pains to distinguish and to refute the Jacobites, Nestorians, and Melkites. Cf. Armand ABEL, *Abū ʿĪsā Muḥammad B. Hārūn al Warrāq; le livre pour la réfutation des trois sectes chrétiennes, texte arabe traduit et présenté* (Mimeo; Bruxelles, 1949).
[94] HAYEK, pp. 78-79.
[95] HAYEK, p. 79.

language: cf., e.g., *an-Nisā'* (4):50, which usually appears in the context of the condemnation of those of the scripture people who put others in association with God (*al-mušrikūn*). Curiously, 'Ammār does not refer directly in this connection to *an-Nisā'* (4):157, which says explicitly in regard to Jesus, that the Jews «did not kill him, nor did they crucify him».

'Ammār reacts by asking how Jesus' crucifixion can be considered to be the imputation of weakness to God, since Muslims rank Jesus as a prophet behind their own prophet. Therefore, he should not be sufficiently worthy, in their view, for the heavens to open etc., because of what was done to him. And they also honor Yaḥyā ibn Zakariya, 'Ammār points out, but they do not think that what happened to him dishonors God.

'Ammār explains that in the divine economy, the crucifixion of Christ was for the purpose of alleviating the anxiety of God's creatures in the face of death, which came upon them as a result of Adam's sin. God displayed Christ's death publicly, according to 'Ammār, so that people could see that the man in whom God was concealed had died. His death in a human body like theirs was clear to them. Then he rose up from the grave alive, and ascended into heaven. Therefore, people may know for certain, that like Christ's, their own human substance is destined to rise from the grave and to escape from the power of death.

'Ammār concludes with this admonition: «This is God's grace and blessing for you, in Christ's crucifixion, O mortal man, which you find to be abominable. You have turned what should be thanks (*šukr*) on your part for it, into ungrateful disbelief (*kufr*) in it, and polemic against it»[96].

9) *Statement on Baptism*

'Ammār pictures the Muslims as mockers and deriders of the practice of baptism, which the Christians prize, and say that it nullifies sin. His response is twofold. First of all, he registers his surprise at the mockery, given the preoccupation of the Muslims with ablutions. Then he explains the sacramental significance of Christian baptism.

'Ammār marvels at the concern on the part of a Muslim, who mocks baptism, to purify himself by washing after the emission of semen, «in which there is imaged his own pure character, for the sake of which heaven and earth were created»[97], as if he were washing

[96] HAYEK, p. 81.
[97] *Ibid.*, p. 81.

away some filth in which nothing more than vermin were imaged, and then he calls the washing a purification[98]. Baptism, on the other hand, 'Ammār says, is a symbol, or similitude (*mit̲h̲āl*) of the resurrection from death, which Christ established, «and made as an image for us, with which we would not forget, but would remember that we too shall rise from the grave as he rose»[99].

'Ammār goes on to explain that a likeness (*mat̲h̲al*) is not the same thing as that of which it is the likeness. Rather, the symbol, or similitude (*al-mit̲h̲āl*) of something points to the actual thing of which it is the similitude. So the water of baptism, he explains at some length, is an apt symbol of man's new birth into grace, due to Christ's death and resurrection, out of the sin to which Adam had introduced him.

10) *Statement on the Eucharist*

Regarding the Eucharist, 'Ammār must explain why Christians, following the example of Jesus, say that bread and wine are his body and blood, and why they call their liturgy a sacrificial offering (*al-qurbān*).

'Ammār points out that in the Gospel, Jesus both names others with his own name, and he names himself with the names of others, for his own special purposes. In the final judgment scene in Mt. 24:35-45, for example, the «little ones» (*aṣ-ṣig̲h̲ār*) are said to stand for Christ. He sets himself up in their place. In the Eucharist he says that the bread and wine are his body and blood, because there is nothing else more suitable to indicate the eternal life that lies beyond the resurrection from the dead. Bread and wine are staples of life. So, Jesus sets them up as memorials of what he has achieved for all men. As 'Ammār puts it,

> He wanted to leave behind with them something by which they would recall his death for them, so that in his resurrection he might make manifest their resurrection, with the result that his own death and resurrection might not be forgotten, since in it there is the life of them all. So, he did not restrict their reminder of it to speech (*al-kalām*), without giving them something concrete which they might receive in their hands, to which he would apply the name of his body, which died, and rose, and was raised up to heaven. He had given them the symbol of his death and resurrection in baptism. Then, when they take into their hands

[98] For citations of Islamic traditions regarding ablutions after sexual intercourse, or an emission of semen, cf. A.J. WENSINCK, *A Handbook of Early Muhammadan Tradition* (Leiden, 1927), pp. 85-86.
[99] HAYEK, p. 82.

> what is named his body, which died and rose, they will recall both the resurrection and eternal life[100].

As for naming his body a sacrificial offering. ʿAmmār explains that this reflects God's way (*sunnat Allāh*) with the Israelites, in regard to their sacrifices for their sins. Christ's death in forgiveness of the sins of all men takes the place of the Israelites' sacrifices. One suspects that ʿAmmār says that to celebrate the Eucharist is to follow God's way, as a counterpoint to the Islamic committment to follow the prophet's way (*sunnat an-nabī*).

11) *Discourse About the Cross*

When the Muslims mock the Christians for kissing the cross, ʿAmmār says that the marvel is that they themselves venerate a stone that the polytheists (*al-mušrikūn*) used to honor and to kiss. He is referring, of course, to the black stone (*al-ḥağar al-aswad*) that is built into the wall of the *Kaʿbah* in Mecca[101].

The cross is an emblem (*aš-šiʿār*), ʿAmmār explains. By touching (*at-tamassuḥ*) this emblem, on which the man was crucified who was the Creator's veil (*ḥiğāb*), a Christian's meaning (*maʿnā*), according to ʿAmmār, is to glorify and to worship the Creator.

Coming back to the Muslim's honor paid to the black stone, ʿAmmār says that if he should say that he honors it because it comes from paradise, the Christian should answer that God forbade the honoring of stones in the scriptures. If he says that it is because of Abraham, the Christian should say, «Do you venerate a stone on account of Abraham, and refuse to venerate a piece of wood for the sake of the Creator's veil, I mean Christ's humanity?»[102] ʿAmmār is aware, of course, that Muslims believe that Abraham laid the foundations of the *Kaʿbah*[103]. And finally, if a Muslim says that in honoring the stone he is worshipping God. ʿAmmār suggests that the Christians ask how this could be admissible since the Muslims claim that God has forbidden this very practice, and commands battle with polytheists on account of it.

12) *Eating and Drinking in the Next World*

In several places in the *Kitāb al-burhān* ʿAmmār has presented

[100] Hayek, p. 85.
[101] Cf. A.J. Wensinck (J. Jomier), «Kaʿba», *EI*², vol. IV, pp. 317-322.
[102] Hayek, p. 88.
[103] Cf. Wensinck, *art. cit.*, p. 318.

the notion of marrying, eating, and drinking in paradise as an Islamic idea that is completely counter to the Gospel message. In this final section of his pamphlet, he says that the Muslims think that the Gospel's denial of such things is a curtailment of the reward that is due to the virtuous. On the contrary, ʿAmmār argues, these things belong to the life of this passing world, and would be unsuitable, and positive disabilities in the everlasting state of joy which the Creator has prepared for his creatures. And he says:

> I do not think those who disagree would claim something least and lowly for the reward of Gabriel, and Michael, and all the angel comrades, nor that their pleasure should consist in the coming of women, food, and drink, more than the pleasure of the angels in anything else[104].

The fact is, ʿAmmār concludes, that in eating, drinking, and marrying, we are associates of the animals. To imagine these activities occurring in a world in which there is no need for them, as there is in this passing world, is to reduce God's reward in the next world to what is least, and needy, and to that in which animals also have a share.

[104] Hayek, pp. 89-90.

THE APOLOGETIC TREATISE OF NONNUS OF NISIBIS

By all accounts the reign of the caliph al-Mutawakkil (847-861) was a turning point in the history of the relationship between Christian and Muslim intellectuals in Iraq in early Abbasid times, just about a century after the success of the Abbasid revolution. In the year 851-852, in an effort to gain full control of the reins of government, the caliph dismissed the corps of advisors and officers he had inherited from his predecessor.[1] Most importantly for our present concern, he put an end to the much discussed *miḥnah*, the inquisition which caliph al-Ma'mūn (813-833) had instituted to ensure the dominance of the rationalistically inclined Mu'tazilites in the Islamic religious establishment.[2] This move favoured the fortunes of the followers of Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal (d. 855), who were opposed to rationalism in religious inquiry and who had been appalled at the high public profile which even non-Muslims had enjoyed in public disputes about religion.[3] Al-Mutawakkil silenced the public controversialists and demanded a rigorous application of the hitherto mostly theoretical legal strictures against the high social profile of *dhimmīs* in public life which were inscribed in the stipulations of the 'Covenant of Umar.'[4] His action marked the end of the first period in the history of the dialogue between Muslims and Christians in the Caliphate in early Islamic times.

The implementation of al-Mutawakkil's policies involved the imprisonment of many of his political adversaries, as well as a number of the public disputants whose arguments about religion had unsettled many in the Islamic establishment. Among them were Christian notables and contro-

[1]See Kennedy, H., *The Prophet and the Age of the Caliphates; the Islamic Near East from the Sixth to the Eleventh Century*, (London & New York, 1986), 169.

[2]See Montgomery Watt, W., *The Formative Period of Islamic Thought*, (Edinburgh, 1973), 256-271.

[3]Even the *mu'tazilī* sympathiser al-Jāḥiẓ (d. 868/9) complained about the disruptions caused by Christian controversialists. See his "Refutation of Christians", in Finkel, J., (ed.), *Three Essays of Abū 'Othman 'Amr ibn Baḥr al-Jāḥiẓ* (Cairo, 1926).

[4]See Fiey, J.M., *Chrétiens syriaques sous les Abbassides, surtout à Bagdad (749-1258)* (CSCO, vol. 420, Louvain, 1980), 83-105.

versialists, including a Syrian Orthodox deacon known as Nonnus of Nisibis.[5] Nonnus was in prison at Samarra from around the year 856 until the end of Mutawakkil's reign. He first appears in the Syriac chronicles in entries recounting the happenings of the first decades of the ninth century. In the year 815 he was sent by patriarch Cyriacus (793-817), at the insistence of his elder relative, Ḥabīb ibn Ḫidmah Abū Rā'iṭah, the Syrian Orthodox bishop of Tagrit,to Armenia to debate with the Melkite controversialist, Theodore Abū Qurrah. According to the surviving reports, the latter had won the allegiance of the Bagratid Armenian prince Ashot Msaker to the Chalcedonian cause. It was Nonnus' claim to fame to have bested the Melkite in argument and so to have secured the prince's support for Syrian Orthodoxy.[6]

Nonnus' sojourn in Armenia presumably was either a prolonged one, or perhaps he made a number of excursions into Armenia of longer or shorter duration. For there survives in an Armenian version a commentary of the Gospel according to St. John by him which, according to the translator's introduction to the text, Nonnus wrote in Arabic at the request of the Armenian prince.[7] The fact that Nonnus wrote this commentary in Arabic is notable because it puts him on the level of his Melkite adversary, Theodore Abū Qurrah, who is one of the earliest Christian writers in Arabic whose name we know,[8] as well as in the company of Abū Rā'iṭah, another writer of Arabic treatises, who was Abū Qurrah's outspoken opponent.[9] All three of them, therefore, were native speakers of Syriac who early on adopted the

[5]What is known of Nonnus' life and work is fully discussed in Van Roey, A., *Nonnus de Nisibe, traité apologétique, étude, texte et traduction* (Bibliothèque du Muséon, vol. 21, Louvain, 1948).

[6]See the report in Chabot, J.-B., *Chronique de Michel le Syrien* (4 vols., Paris, 1899-1910), vol. III, 32-34 (French), vol. IV, 495-496 (Syriac).

[7]The text is published in Črakhean, Kh. H., (ed), *Commentary on the Gospel of John by Nonnus, Vardapet of Syria [Armenian]* (Treasure of Armenian Literature Ancient and Modern, vol. 7, Venice, 1920). See also Mariès, L., "Un commentaire sur l'évangile de saint Jean, rédigé en arabe (circa 840) par Nonnos (Nana) de Nisibe, conservé dans une traduction arménienne (circa 856)", *Revue des Études Arméniennes*, 1 (1921), 273-296; Akinian, N., "Theodore Abu-Qurrah and Nonnus of Syria in Armenia and the Armenian Translation of the John Commentary of Nonnus [Armenian]", *Handes Amsorya*, 36 (1922), cols. 203-204; Bundy, D.D., "The Commentary of Nonnus of Nisibis on the Prologue of John", in Samir, Kh., (ed), *Actes du premier congrès international d'études arabes chrétiennes* (Orientalia Christiana Analecta, 218, Rome, 1982), 123-133.

[8]See the discussion and full bibliography in Nasrallah, J., *Histoire du mouvement littéraire dans l'église melchite du V au XX^e siècle, II*, tome 2, 750-X^e S., Louvain & Paris, 1988), 104-134.

[9]See Graf, G., *Die Schriften des Jacobiten Ḥabīb ibn Ḫidma Abū Rā'iṭa* (CSCO, vols. 130 & 131, Louvain, 1951). See also Griffith, S.H., "Ḥabīb ibn Ḫidmah Abū Rā'iṭah, a Christian *mutakallim* of the First Abbasid Century", *Oriens Christianus*, 64 (1980), 161-201.

Arabic language, not only as a practical measure for life in the caliphate, but as a medium of expression for the Christian faith. For all three of them were apologists for Christianity in the Islamic milieu where religious discourse in Arabic was already in large part determined by the Qur'ān.

Nonnus again appears in the Syriac chronicles, together with Abū Rā'iṭah, as an accuser of bishop Philoxenos of Nisibis, who in the year 827/828 was deposed from his see by the action of a synod held at Resh'aynā. Nonnus had been one of those who brought the reports of Philoxenos' objectionable behaviour to the attention of the patriarch, Dionysius of Tell Maḥrē (818-845).[10] His participation in this affair marks his interest in the public life of the church in the caliphate, a penchant which in the Islamic milieu often attracted the unwanted attention of the civil authorities.

For some reason which is now beyond recovery, Nonnus was imprisoned by the caliph al-Mutawakkil, as we have said, around the year 856 A.D.[11] The evidence for this eventuality is the testimony included in the introductory paragraph to a four-part treatise which he wrote in Syriac while he was in prison, against the Christological doctrines of Thomas, the metropolitan bishop of Beth Garmay and brother of the Nestorian *catholicos* Theodosius (853-858).[12] For a while these three men were prisoners together. Nonnus wrote his treatise in response to issues raised in debate between himself and Thomas, completing it only after the latter's release.[13] The same manuscript contains three other Syriac compositions ascribed to Nonnus: two letters on Christological topics, and one long apologetic treatise, also in the form of a letter, in justification of the doctrines of the Trinity and the Incarnation. All of these texts were presumably composed by Nonnus while he was a prisoner, and they are all preserved in the single manuscript known to contain them, BM Or.MS 719 (add. 14,594), which was brought to the Monastery of the Syrians in Egypt, the Monastery of the Mother of God, by abbot Moses of Nisibis in the year 932 A.D.[14] Of the four works contained in the manuscript, only the

[10]See Chabot, *Chronique de Michel, III*, 50, *IV*, 507. See also Van Roey, Nonnus de Nisibe, 15, 23.

[11]See the discussion in Van Roey, *Nonnus de Nisibe*, 23-25.

[12]On the identity of Thomas of Beth Garmay, as distinguished from that of his contemporary, Thomas of Marga, see Fiey, J.M., "Thomas de Marga, notule de littérature syriaque", *Le Muséon*, 78 (1965), 361-366.

[13]The treatise remains unpublished, and so far the only published study is the brief one by Van Roey, A., "La liberté du Christ dans la doctine de Nonnus de Nisibe", in *Symposium Syriacum 1972* (Orientalia Christiana Analecta, 197, Rome, 1974), 471-485.

[14]See Wright, W., *Catalogue of Syriac Manuscripts I-III* (London, 1870-1872), *II*, 618-620.

apologetical treatise on the Trinity and the Incarnation has so far been published.[15] It is the text under discussion in the present essay.

As for Nonnus himself, he was presumably freed from incarceration after al-Mutawakkil's death in 861 A.D. For both Byzantine and Armenian sources report his presence at the Armenian council of Shirakawan in 862 A.D.[16] But after this date no more is heard of Nonnus in the surviving sources. From what is known of him from his writings and from the several reports about him in the chronicles to which we have alluded it is clear that Nonnus' principal claim to fame was his success as a religious controversialist. Even the commentary on the Gospel according to St. John, as A. Van Roey has remarked, is, for all practical purposes, "an apology for the divinity of Christ".[17] So it may well have been the case that Nonnus' very success in the milieu of the Christian and Muslim *mutakallimūn* of the first half of the ninth century was the reason for his imprisonment when al-Mutawakkil decided to put an end to public arguments about religion in the caliphate.

The purpose of the present essay is to study Nonnus' 'Apologetic Treatise' from the perspective of the contemporary efforts of Christian writers in Syriac and Arabic to commend the Christian faith in an intellectual milieu which was dominated by Islam and by the preoccupations of the Muslim *mutakallimūn*. More is known now about the milieu than was generally easily available in 1948 when Van Roey published the treatise. Accordingly, the study unfolds under three headings: the scope and purpose of the treatise; the topics under discussion; and a brief summary consideration of Nonnus' place among the important apologists for Christianity in the early Islamic period.

SCOPE AND PURPOSE OF THE TREATISE

Nonnus' 'Apologetic Treatise' is the first of the four works which the unique manuscript of his Syriac compositions contains.[18] The scribe's note at the beginning gives a fair indication of its contents. It describes the work as a tract (*mamlô*) which Nonnus wrote "for a man whose name he did not indicate, who had posed questions" about three topics: how do Christians

[15]It is published, translated into Latin, and discussed extensively in Van Roey, *Nonnus de Nisibe*.

[16]See Van Roey, *Nonnus de Nisibe*, 25.

[17]Van Roey, *Nonnus de Nisibe*, 29.

[18]BM 14,594, ff. 2^{b}-20^{a}. Hereinafter the text is cited according to Van Roey's edition, except for one or two places where reference to the manuscript is necessary.

show that God is one; how do they show that the one God is also three; and, borrowing a phrase from the tract itself, how do they show that the incarnation of the Word God, one of the Holy Trinity "came about fittingly and divinely appropriately?"[19] On the face of it, and as we shall see in more detail, the three topics are standard ones in the Christian/Muslim dialogue.

Nonnus himself wrote a foreword and a brief afterword to the treatise. In the foreword he follows the convention of Syriac prefaces in that he discounts his own worthiness and pledges to provide answers not of his own making, but from what the saints of old had set forth.[20] In the process he gives voice to the principle that "to theory (θεωρία) there fittingly belongs the seal of ascetical practice (*dubbōrê*)",[21] and it is in the latter realm in particular that he locates his own personal shortcoming. As for the addressee of the treatise, in the foreword Nonnus is no more definite than to refer to him as "O diligent man, whoever you are".[22]

In the afterword Nonnus is somewhat more forthcoming. He refers to his addressee as a 'Questioner', and he goes on to distinguish between one who might be either a stranger (*nûkrōyô*) or a member of the household (*baytōyô*). He says,

> If then these things, good questioner, are found to be in accord with your expectation, it is God's goodness. If you are a stranger, it is that you have been grafted into the good olive tree; if you are of the household, of the home and the sheep-fold, there may be in these things something useful to you for some opportunity.[23]

Given the contents of the treatise, the 'stranger' and the 'member of the household' might the most easily be thought of as a Muslim (or a Jew) and a Christian respectively. However, given the fact that the language of the treatise is Syriac, it seems clear that its intended audience was exclusively Christian. On this assumption the easiest course is to suppose that Nonnus meant his treatise to serve as a manual for Christian readers, perhaps clergymen, who had to deal on the one hand with questioners outside the faith, such as Muslims, and on the other hand with questioning Christians themselves, who may have been attracted to Islam and were in danger of conversion if the intellectual challenge of the Muslims could not be met. On

[19]Van Roey, Nonnus de Nisibe, 1*. See also p. 13* for the borrowed phrase.

[20]See Riad, E., *Studies in the Syriac Preface* (Uppsala, 1988).

[21]Van Roey, *Nonnus de Nisibe*, 1*.

[22]Van Roey, *Nonnus de Nisibe*, 1*.

[23]Van Roey, *Nonnus de Nisibe*, 34*.

this hypothesis the questioner was not the reader of the treatise, but the one to whose queries the reader would have to respond. As a prominent controversialist, fluent in both Arabic and Syriac, Nonnus himself must often have been faced with questioners of both varieties. He therefore used his time in prison to set down his most successful arguments for the benefit of others.

At one point in the treatise there is some oblique evidence that in Nonnus' day there were in fact arguments about religion between Mulsims and Christians, but that to engage in them was not entirely safe. Toward the end of the treatise, in a passage in which the writer is giving an account of why some people, *ḥanpê* as he calls them, may fall away from the religion of the two Testaments, i.e., Christianity, he lists reasons for the lapse. He mentions a childishness that is even more childish, he says, than that childishness which he ascribes to the Jews of old, "not to mention", he says, "other things that it is not safe to talk about, in which there is the contrary stance, against the two scriptures, i.e., the two Testaments, and even against nature and sober thinking".[24]

In context Nonnus can only be talking about the Muslims, as we shall see. Elsewhere in the treatise he calls them the "new pagans (*ḥadtê ḥanpê*)",[25] who have only recently come onto the religious scene. Their Islamic identity becomes clear as one examines Nonnus' discussion of the main questions he sets out to answer in the treatise. They are the questions which broach the principal topics of discussion between Muslims and Christians in the ninth century.

THE TOPICS UNDER DISCUSSION

Formally speaking, as the scribe's note at the head of Nonnus' apologetic treatise enumerates them, there are three topics under discussion in the text: the existence of the one God; the one God in three hypostases (*qnōmê*); and the incarnation of the Word God. In fact the third topic occupies about two thirds of the pages in the work, and in addition to a consideration of the Christian doctrine of the Incarnation it includes a scheme for the comparison of the major religions of the day, with a view to highlighting what the author puts forward as the moral superiority of Christianity. All of these topics were on the discussion agenda between Muslims and Christians in the ninth century. And the influence of the concerns of the Muslim controversialists is evident in the ways in which Nonnus conducts his

[24]Van Roey, *Nonnus de Nisibe*, 34*.
[25]Van Roey, *Nonnus de Nisibe*, 12*.

discussions of them.

The Existence of the One God

The first topic is the one to which Nonnus devoted the least space in his treatise. One has the distinct impression that he is less interested in elaborating arguments to demonstrate the existence of the one God than he is in establishing a premise to which he will return as the treatise progresses. The premise is one which all the participants in the Muslim/Christian dialogue can immediately accept, and Nonnus states it in language which could almost have been quoted from the *Qur'ān*. It is a conception of the nature of God which emphasizes omnipotence. Nonnus says of God,

> If he is perfect, and there is nothing lacking to him, not a single one of the things appropriate to God, it is evident that everything he wills, he does.[26]

The last phrase in this quotation echoes the oft repeated statement in the *Qur'ān* that "God does what he wills" (e.g., *al-Baqarah*, II: 253, or *Āl 'Imrān*, III: 40). Nonnus uses this assumed premise to argue that the notion of many gods is really therefore an impossible one because he could not fulfil the agreed definition of God, in that the existence of other gods would limit his omnipotence. "The result would be no god at all",[27] as Nonnus says. And he had begun the discussion with the observation that the atheist position "is another matter and not the one posed here", for as he says, "whoever says there are many gods is as a matter of fact against the statement that there is none, because he acknowledges that there is divinity in the gods and goddesses, just as'one' is by all means in the 'many'".[28]

At the end of this brief section in his treatise, Nonnus very summarily adduces the argument from the harmony of the effects of the maker of the universe as a demonstration of the unity of God. He cites the creature man in particular, whom he calls "a vessel and a bundle of contrarieties - a loud-voiced herald of the unity of the maker".[29]

Here we have no more than a nod to the cosmological argument for the existence of the one God which was a common one for both Muslims and Christian *mutakallimūn*.[30] It is as if for his present purpose Nonnus could

[26]Van Roey, *Nonnus de Nisibe*, 2*.
[27]Van Roey, *Nonnus de Nisibe*, 3*.
[28]Van Roey, *Nonnus de Nisibe*, 2*.
[29]Van Roey, *Nonnus de Nisibe*, 3*.
[30]See Wolfson, H.A., *The Philosophy of the Kalam* (Cambridge, Mass., 1976), 373-465; Craig, W.L., *The Kalām Cosmological Argument* (New York, 1979); Abrahamov, B., "Al-Ḳāsim ibn

briefly allude to it as common ground he shared with his interlocutors, and quickly move on to the next topic.

One God in Three Qnōmê

Building on the principle he had asserted in the opening passages of the treatise, that the one God must be perfect in every way, Nonnus begins his discussion of the Trinity with an exploration of the sense of the proposition that God is one (*ḥad Allōhô*), in a phrase which reminds the reader straight away of the *Qur'ān*'s dictum, "God is one" (*al-Iḫlāṣ* CXII: 1). Nonnus says,

> This [statement], 'God is one', if it pertains to Him only in regard to number, He is lacking because of the fact that there is another and much more honorable unity.[31]

For Nonnus this preferred unity is one in which a number of individuals (*qnōmê*) are 'one,' in the sense of being equal in *ousia* (he transliterates the Greek word into Syriac). And he then goes on to cite passages from the scriptures where David in the Psalms or Paul in his epistles refer to God's 'Spirit', or to the Father's 'Power' and 'Wisdom' in such a way as to make it clear that the reference is to God himself. Nonnus then concludes that the quotations he has cited "from Paul and David goad us on to perceive that besides being 'one', God is triply subsistent (*thlîthō'îth mqayyam*)".[32]

Clearly such a quick explanation is not an argument calculated to convince Muslims, but a short-hand review of the sources of the doctrine of the Trinity for the Christian reader. Nevertheless, Nonnus does make the remark at this point in the treatise that

> It is not only about the literal sense that I have something to say, even for those of the household of the faith, but there is also the concern that the others come to know how deep is the richness of God's wisdom for us in these hiddenly exalted things.[33]

After this aside, in which the "the others", like the "stranger" mentioned earlier, are presumably the Muslims, Nonnus proceeds to state his conclusion in regard to God's perfect unity in three *qnōmê*, but one nature (*kyōnô*), common to the three. He says,

Ibrāhīm's Argument from Design", *Oriens*, 29-30 (1986), 259-284; Griffith, S.H., "Faith and Reason in Christian *Kalām*: Theodore Abū Qurrah on Discerning the True Religion", to appear in the proceedings of the "First Woodbroke Mingana Symposium on 'Christian Arabic Apologetic Texts during the Abbasid Period 750-1258 C.E.'".

[31]Van Roey, *Nonnus de Nisibe*, 4*.

[32]Van Roey, *Nonnus de Nisibe*, 5*.

[33]Van Roey, *Nonnus de Nisibe*, 5*.

> If God is perfect, his being 'one' is also perfect. At the same time, in each one of the *qnōmê*, the fact that He is also one in number is maintained for us. Just as Peter, of and for himself, is one man, and he together with Paul and John and all the rest are one man altogether, first by the *qnōmô*, then by the nature (*kyōnô*), so each one of the holy *qnōmê*, is God and Lord, and *ousia* ... a perfect Trinity of three perfect ones![34]

Next Nonnus takes up the question of why there are three *qnōmê* and not ten or more, corresponding to other names and titles for God to be found in the scriptures. To answer this question he makes distinctions based on the referents to which the predicates ascribed to God in the scriptures refer. He says,

> It is known that whatever is said about God is indicative of either his essence (*ithûtheh*), or of his power and his glory, or of his economy and his activity.[35]

On the basis of this principle, Nonnus then says simply, "As everyone agrees, even apart from the scriptures, God has a Word and a Spirit".[36]

Here one may hear an echo even of the *Qur'ān*'s teaching, as it appears in the famous verse which says of Jesus the Messiah that he is "God's messenger, and his Word ..., and a Spirit from him" (*an-Nisā'*, IV: 171). And from this point on Nonnus ascribes all other attributes of God not to his essence, to which Word and Spirit alone refer, he says, but to the divine power and glory, or to God's activity and economy. For example, Nonnus says in regard to an adversary's persistence in this matter of the attributes that some of them obviously refer to God's power and economy. So in response to such an adversary, Nonnus replies,

> Even if he mentions an eye or an ear, or any other one of the bodily properties we have, it is mentioned because God knows everything even before it comes to be, as one who sees and hears. Otherwise, how could these bodily appurtenances be imagined in connection with God's essence?"[37]

The most reasonable construction to put upon this line of reasoning is to see in it an awareness on Nonnus' part of some of the most frequent attributes of God to be found in the *Qur'ān* (e.g., *an-Nisā'*, IV: 58), as well as an awareness of the distinctions which Muslim *mutakallimūn* in his day were

[34]Van Roey, *Nonnus de Nisibe*, 5*.

[35]Van Roey, *Nonnus de Nisibe*, 6*.

[36]Van Roey, *Nonnus de Nisibe*, 6*.

[37]Van Roey, *Nonnus de Nisibe*, 7*.

willing to make in their own discussions of the *ṣifāt Allāh*.[38]

Finally, Nonnus spends some lines discussing 'three' as the perfect number, which in itself expresses a pefect unity, which alone, according to Nonnus, can characterise the perfect one which is the one God, who is by definition perfect in every way. 'Three' is said to be the perfect number because unlike any other number it includes within itself an odd number (1) and an even number (2), which are perfectly concomitant in the number 'three', according to Nonnus, in a way which is untrue of any other number lower or higher.[39] So in Nonnus' view numerology simply confirms what the scriptures already attest, namely that the one perfect God is also three.[40] And he concludes his discussion of this whole topic with some remarks about how the distinctions he has drawn allow one to understand how God can also be called perfectly 'good', 'wise', 'powerful', and 'just', the very attributes of God which appear so prominently both in the *Qur'ān* and in the discussions of the *mutakallimūn*.

Obviously, on this topic too, as in the first one, Nonnus refrains from developing his arguments in any detail. One supposes that his remarks were intended only to remind the reader of the gist of the line of reasoning which Nonnus the controversialist would employ in addressing himself to issues which in the present treatise are actually just introductory to what he really wants to talk about. The remainder of the treatise, in fact more than two-thirds of it, is devoted to the third topic, in which Nonnus' orginality as an apologist truly comes to the fore. Perhaps Nonnus simply presumed that earlier apologists, such as his uncle Abū Rā'iṭah, of whose arguments Nonnus' remarks thus far in the 'Apologetic Treatise' are not a bad summary, had already adequately addressed themselves to the topics of the one God and the doctrine of the Trinity. Meanwhile, Nonnus himself was now anxious to defend the doctrine of the Incarnation in a novel way which put the emphasis on the demonstration of the doctrine's credibility, not so much from a consideration of its inner coherence, or from the scriptures, but from the manifest superiority of Christianity, - he argues - which espouses this doctrine, to the other religions of the day.

[38]On the Islamic discussions see Frank, R.M., *Beings and their Attributes* (Albany, N.Y., 1978); Gimaret, D., *Les noms divins en Islam; exégèse lexicographique et théologique* (Paris, 1988).

[39]Van Roey, *Nonnus de Nisibe*, 7* & 8*.

[40]Nonnus shared this argument from numerology with his elder relative, Abū Rā'iṭah; see the discussion in Griffith, "Ḥabīb ibn Ḥidmah Abū Rā'iṭah", 180-181.

The Incarnation of the Word God

Nonnus sets out in two steps to demonstrate the credibility of the belief that "the incarnation of one of the holy Trinity, the Word God, came about fittingly and divinely appropriately".[41] First he argues that all contemporary religious communities testify to the coming of Christ and to the fact of a religious transformation of society due to the propagation of the Gospel. Secondly, he argues that in this saving transformation of society which all acknowledge, Christ's own accomplishments are such that he can only logically be described as 'good', 'wise', 'powerful', and 'just' to a degree that befits divinity alone, and that he is in fact the Word God incarnate. In the course of the elaboration of these arguments Nonnus compares Christianity to other religions, and particularly to Judaism and Islam.

1. The Coming of Christ

Nonnus declares categorically that all of the peoples (*'ammê*) of the world, of whatever opinion or creed, acknowledge Christ's appearance "and that he has introduced a new religious alternative into the world, and he has made the peoples submit (*ashlem l'ammê*)".[42] To support this declaration Nonnus cites the testimony of four religious groups: the polytheists, whom he calls "the *ḥanpê* of old"; the dualists and triadists; the Jews; and "those of the present-day *ḥanpê*, who acknowledge that God is one, and are against the other [*ḥanpê*]".[43]

a. The Polytheists

According to Nonnus the ancient polytheists testify to the morally transforming effects of the Gospel because most converts to Christianity came from among their number, and the books and relics of the past are still abundantly available to enable anyone to see the differences between the two religions. He says of this group,

They were of the majority of those whom the evangelical net enclosed, i.e., all of us, or most of us, except for those who had been caught by the Jews or the Magians.[44]

b. The Dualists

Among the dualists and triadists Nonnus at first listed the Magians, and

[41]Van Roey, *Nonnus de Nisibe*, 9*.

[42]Van Roey, *Nonnus de Nisibe*, 9*.

[43]Van Roey, *Nonnus de Nisibe*, 9*.

[44]Van Roey, *Nonnus de Nisibe*, 10*.

the community of Mani and Marcion.[45] But when he comes to discuss their testimony to the advent of Christ, he is principally concerned with the Magians. And the primary acknowledgement of Christ he adduces from them is what he claims is their memory, "preserved in their own ancient history",[46] of the visit of the three Magi to the infant Jesus, bearing gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh (Mt. 2:1-12). Nonnus is quick to point out that while gold is a gift fit for a king, frankincense is fit only for God, and myrrh "was the sign of the death he would bear, and that known to be willingly".[47] For, as the Gospel says, the spices Nicodemus brought for Jesus' burial were a mixture of myrrh and aloes (cf. Jn. 19:39). Therefore, according to Nonnus:

> These Magians confirm what we say, from the tradition of their own forebears, and they even add additional things which point out the majesty and divinity of the one who was adored by them on their own.[48]

As for the others, and Nonnus presumably here means Marcionites and Manichaeans, he says that they too "confess that there is a son of the Good One, sent for the salvation of the wronged, who appeared on earth and went about among men up to a certain time".[49]

c. The Jews.

Nonnus gives short shrift to the Jews, whom he calls "abusive and blasphemous". And he says of their response to Christ, "they acknowledge his miracles, as of an impostor or a magician".[50] But as far as Nonnus is concerned this much still confirms his point. For not only do the Jews thereby acknowledge Jesus' career, they also, he says, "admit that Paul and the other apostles were from among them, and that they were preachers everywhere under heaven.[51]

[45]Van Roey, *Nonnus de Nisibe*, 9*. It is noteworthy that Nonnus omits the name of Bar Dayṣān from his list. Even in the Islamic heresiography of the day one finds Marcion, Mani, and Bar Dayṣān. See Vajda, G., "Le témoignage d'al-Māturidī sur la doctrine des Manichéens, des Daysanites et des Marcionites", *Arabica*, 13 (1966), 1-38, 113-128.

[46]Van Roey, *Nonnus de Nisibe*, 10*.

[47]Van Roey, *Nonnus de Nisibe*, 10*.

[48]Van Roey, *Nonnus de Nisibe*, 11*.

[49]Van Roey, *Nonnus de Nisibe*, 11*-12*.

[50]Van Roey, *Nonnus de Nisibe*, 12*.

[51]Van Roey, *Nonnus de Nisibe*, 12*.

d. The New Ḥanpê.

As for the Muslims, Nonnus obviously enjoys calling them *ḥanpê*, the customary Syriac word for persons whom westerners would call 'pagans'. For the Syriac word *ḥanpô* (pl. *ḥanpê*) is cognate to the Arabic word *ḥanīf* (pl. *ḥunafā'*), a term which in the *Qur'ān* and elsewhere in Islamic literature is used to mean not a 'pagan', but a believer in the one God. Such a person is therefore considered by Muslims to be neither a Jew nor a Christian, but to be like Abraham, a 'Muslim' before the advent of Islam more conventionally so called (see *Āl 'Imrān*, III: 67). Nonnus and other Syriac writers who used the word *ḥanpê* to designate the Muslims doubtless appreciated the double entendre inherent in the use of the word.[52]

Concerning the matter at hand, the acknowledgement of Christ's coming by the non-Christian religious communities of the day, Nonnus says,

> The new *ḥanpê* are much more right-minded than the others. For they confess that he was born of a virgin and she was chaste (*Āl 'Imrān*, III: 47; *Maryam*, XIX: 20), and that he is the Word and Spirit of God (*Āl 'Imrān*, III:45; *an-Nisā'*, IV: 171). They add many miracles, even this one, that he is the Creator who created a bird of clay (*Āl 'Imrān*, III: 49; *al-Mā'idah*, V: 110), just as the Creator [created] Adam of old. They acknowledge that he ascended into heaven (*an-Nisā'*, IV: 158) and that he is ready to come a second time into the world. But being excessive in paying honour, they will not accept the fact that he was crucified and died (*an-Nisā'*, IV: 157).[53]

This is one of the most positive statements about Islam which one can find in Syriac or Arabic Christian texts of the early Islamic period. And it is clear that Nonnus is well informed about what the *Qur'ān* teaches. It is clear too that the *Qur'ān*'s portrait of Jesus as the Christ fits perfectly into the scheme of Nonnus' apologetic argument at this point in the treatise. It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that it was the Islamic Christology, if one may so use the term, that in fact inspired Nonnus to structure his argument in precisely the way he does at this juncture in the work.

From the quick review of the four religious communities whose views he cites, Nonnus concludes that actually "all the peoples acknowledge the

[52]See the fuller discussion, with bibliography, in Griffith, S.H., "The Prophet Muḥammad, his Scripture and his Message according to the Christian Apologies in Arabic and Syriac from the first Abbasid Century", in Fahd, T., (ed), *Vie du prophète Mahomet* (Colloque de Strasbourg, 1980, Paris, 1983), 118-121.

[53]Van Roey, *Nonnus de Nisibe*, 12*.

appearance of the Saviour, the Messiah".[54] And he goes on to maintain that it was people from these very communities, and he makes no exception for the Muslims,[55] who converted to Christianity. "To these and such like them", he says, "fishermen and not scholars taught wisdom and chastity".[56] And Nonnus emphasises the point that in most places, the small band of twelve apostles were foreign, unlearned men, who had neither arms nor wealth at their disposal. And from these considerations he concludes,

> Therefore, all the peoples acknowledge the general salvation that came about by means of the saviour of all, Christ. In every way they were persuaded of the fact that his appearance came about fittingly and divinely appropriately. ... As these people say, he is a kind of prophet, or they suppose he is one especially chosen.[57]

It is difficult to avoid the observation that in this conclusion Nonnus gives voice to a particularly Islamic view of Christ. It is the *Qur'ān*'s view that Jesus the Messiah was among the prophets whom God sent to mankind (*an-Nisā'*, IV: 163), and that he was one from among the progeny of Abraham and 'Imrān, whom God had especially chosen (*Āl 'Imrān*, III: 33).

2. The Divinity of Christ

As far as Nonnus was concerned, there remained only the question of Christ's true identity to answer, once it was demonstrated that at his coming a religious transformation had occurred, to which the devotees of the contemporary religions testified. Nonnus put the question as follows:

> Whether the Word God accomplished it by himself personally (*baqnômeh*), one of the Holy Trinity, as the Christians say, or a human being [did it], a man who was appointed, as those who are non-Christians stupidly say?[58]

Nonnus sets out to prove the Christian position by arguing that in the accomplishment of the religious transformation of mankind, Christ manifested the general attributes (*shûdō'ē*) 'goodness', 'wisdom', 'power', and 'justice', to such a high degree of perfection that, as he manifested them,

[54]Van Roey, *Nonnus de Nisibe*, 12*.

[55]There were stories current in the Christian communities which told of Muslim converts to Christianity in the early Islamic period, but their number cannot have been great. See Griffith, S.H., "The Arabic Account of 'Abd al-Masīḥ an-Nağrānī al-Ghassānī", *Le Muséon*, 98 (1985), 331-374.

[56]Van Roey, *Nonnus de Nisibe*, 12*.

[57]Van Roey, *Nonnus de Nisibe*, 13*.

[58]Van Roey, *Nonnus de Nisibe*, 14*.

they were appropriate to God alone. And Nonnus claimed that the act of transformation or salvation of all peoples which Christ brought about was itself comparable to God's act of creating the world. In the process, says Nonnus, the four general attributes can then be seen to be those "in terms of which all the others appropriate to God as such are expressed".[59] And he maintains that all four of them are simultaneously evident in Christ's actions, inseparably from one another.

As Nonnus begins his review of the evidence for maintaining the divine character of these principal attributes of Christ's behaviour, he makes the claim that the adversary is bound to appraise what the Christians say in this regard on their own terms and not according to what he, the adversary, thinks is right.[60] What Nonnus means is that he will be citing his evidence from the Gospel, and the New Testament generally, and that even if there are those who contend against these scriptures, they should nevertheless be convinced by common sense and right reason, as Nonnus hopes to show, of the case for which he is arguing.

Christ's divine 'goodness', according to Nonnus, is manifest in the total gift of himself for others, even to the point of suffering a criminal's death.[61] His 'wisdom' is said to be evident in his cures. "It is the magnitude of the healing", says Nonnus, "and its comprehensiveness, that testify to a wisdom appropriate to God, and that he (i.e., Christ) is the heavenly Creator".[62] His 'power' is seen in his defeat of the demons, "the enemies of the human race".[63] But for Nonnus, the incarnation itself, *quod erat demonstandum*, is the major indicator of Christ's divine power. He says of it,

> He is 'powerful' because he could become man, while not being changed, ... being who he was in his 'hypostasis' (*baqnômeh*), he became what a man is naturally and 'hypostatically' (*qnômō'îth*). . . The witness of the 'power' is what he showed to the world in his deeds; in them there shone that magnitude of what befits divinity, undimmed in human lowliness.[64]

In connection with Christ's 'power' Nonnus also mentions his mother and her virginal conception. For "in her, nature was overcome and

[59]Van Roey, *Nonnus de Nisibe*, 14*.

[60]See Van Roey, *Nonnus de Nisibe*, 15* & 17*.

[61]See Van Roey, *Nonnus de Nisibe*, 15*.

[62]Van Roey, *Nonnus de Nisibe*, 16*.

[63]Van Roey, *Nonnus de Nisibe*, 16*.

[64]Van Roey, *Nonnus de Nisibe*, 17*.

overpowered, along with every law of nature".[65] And the mention of the virgin birth gives Nonnus another opportunity to refer to the Muslims. He says, "Even those *ḥanpê* who are apart from us are unfriendly witnesses to [his] mother's virginity".[66] Then with a reference to the prophecy in Isaiah 7:14, Nonnus says,

> Whereas the Jew acknowledges that it will come about, from the very fact that it was prophesied, but that it has not yet come about, the *ḥanpô* [acknowledges] that it has come about and has issued into fact.[67]

According to Nonnus, Christ's 'justice' is to be seen in the fact that he accomplished man's salvations not by force but by spiritual attraction. For, as Nonnus says, "It would neither be 'powerful', nor 'wise', nor 'just' that he should use force toward those who were created to conduct themselves by means of the will - of themselves they are to be justified or to be condemned".[68] Christ became man, Nonnus goes on to explain, to give mankind the opportunity to opt for the good, parallel to the action of Satan, who had seduced humanity to sin. Nonnus puts it this way:

> Just as he, being Satan, contrived to seem to be a snake by means of a veil, so did the 'Just One' contrive to seem to be a man, according to that veil of flesh, and not the God who was hidden in it. However, he was one (*mḥayyad*) because he was incarnate. He did become incarnate; it was not that he took on a likeness for a time. ... He was truly man, and not only a phantasm.[69]

In this quotation Nonnus finds the opportunity not only to highlight the 'justice' of Christ's appeal to man's free will, parallel to the original free human choice for sin, but he also uses that occasions to give a clear statement of his Monophysite Christology, in the process distancing himself carefully from any suspicion of docetism. For him, in Christ, God was truly incarnate, and this was the fact to which Christ's own manifestation of the attributes of 'goodness', 'wisdom', 'power', and 'justice' truly pointed.

[65]Van Roey, *Nonnus de Nisibe*, 17*.
[66]Van Roey, *Nonnus de Nisibe*, 17*.
[67]Van Roey, *Nonnus de Nisibe*, 17*.
[68]Van Roey, *Nonnus de Nisibe*, 18*. Here, of course, Nonnus is taking a position on an issue that divided Christians and Muslims, viz. the moral freedom of the will. However, Nonnus does not advert to this controversy, as did his older comtemporary and adversary, Abū Qurrah. See Griffith, S.H., "Free Will in Christian Kalām: the Doctrine of Theodore Abū Qurrah", *Parole de l'Orient*, 14 (1987), 79-107.
[69]Van Roey, *Nonnus de Nisibe*, 18*-19*.

Nonnus therefore made the following negative conclusion about Christ's behaviour:

> It was not such as befits the conduct of the servile ministries (*teshmshōthô 'abdōnyyōtô*) of the prophets, or of those other helpers, such as the patriarchs, the kings and the priests.[70]

By way of example, Nonnus then argues on behalf of Christ's divine power by calling to mind what he regards as the testimony of the moral miracle of the conversion of the Egyptians to Christ. Having come to the lowest point of idolatrous and moral depravity, according to Nonnus, the Egyptians, once they accepted Christ, became exemplary ascetics who have produced numerous monks, martyrs and ecclesiastical dignitaries. This transformation, Nonnus claims, bespeaks divinity in Christ, in a way that is, as he says, "completely justifiable by reason".[71]

At this point in the treatise Nonnus goes off on a completely different tack, satisfied that he has made his case that Christ's 'goodness', 'wisdom', 'power', and 'justice' were manifest at such a pitch in his life that only his being of the divine nature could account for it. Next Nonnus turns to reflect on what for him is the fact that the Christians have inherited what was best in both paganism and Judaism, which between them, in his opinion, had previously occupied the whole world. Now, he claims, the Christians have surpassed the pagans in the arts and sciences and the Jews in the knowledge of the text and the interpretation of the holy scriptures.

For a number of pages Nonnus considers God's dealings with the Jews, both the divine promises of salvation, the numerous instances of salvation in their history, and their subsequent relapse into sin. But now, he says, "for a period of nearly 900 years, day after day, events have been going backwards for them".[72] According to Nonnus the reason is as follows:

> Because they did not accept the new covenant, different from the old one, they were rejected. This was their gross sin, the denial of the one who was proclaimed in the new covenant.[73]

As for the promises recorded in the Old Testament, many of which Nonnus quotes, he regards them as having been fulfilled in Christianity. And he says in connection with them that now, "apart from the Christians, there are none who would dare speak" about these promises.[74] For,

[70]Van Roey, *Nonnus de Nisibe*, 20*.
[71]Van Roey, *Nonnus de Nisibe*, 21*.
[72]Van Roey, *Nonnus de Nisibe*, 24*.
[73]Van Roey, *Nonnus de Nisibe*, 25*.
[74]Van Roey, *Nonnus de Nisibe*, 27*.

according to Nonnus, all that he has brought forward from the scriptures thus far in his treatise supports the Christians, and he says,

> True therefore is their confession of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and the fact that he is God and Lord, one of the Trinity - the Only-Begotten, he who has been grandly and eternally present in the womb of the Father.[75]

Having relied so much in the previous pages on the testimony of the Christian interpretation of the scriptures, which he had claimed any fair questioner should allow,[76] Nonnus finally turns to the argument from reason, claiming that "even from reason a man can after all, and from the facts themselves, ratify that it was God who appeared on earth and went among men".[77] But the argument from reason is not so straightforward as to proceed directly to the mysteries of the Trinity and the Incarnation. For while the terms of the doctrines are easily definable, Nonnus admits that to understand them is not easy. He says,

> We believe, to begin at the top, that God is 'one', who is not 'one' in number, something that is easy to understand and to persist in believing, but three *qnōmê* is something difficult to accept. ... The mind of everyman, except for the few who have been enlightened in the Spirit, and those who meditate carefully and with the fear of God, comes to the point of justifying that there belong to the realities they name 'Father' and 'Son' names in which there is something supposed to be inferior and unfit for God. ... That one of these three came down from heaven, was conceived and contained in the womb ... Both of these things are incredible according to the laws of nature.[78]

Nonnus then goes on for some pages listing the human experiences of Christ which on the face of it would seem to be completely incompatible with divinity. And it is at this juncture that he comes to what he considers to be his argument from reason. He says,

> These are the very things that all nations and peoples, wholly or in part, kings and commoners, wise men and fools, philosophers and rustics (*paggōnê*), have gradually accepted. They are holding on to it even now and they will struggle for it to the point of death - even more than these recent ones who

[75]Van Roey, *Nonnus de Nisibe*, 27*.
[76]See note 60 above.
[77]Van Roey, *Nonnus de Nisibe*, 28*.
[78]Van Roey, *Nonnus de Nisibe*, 29* & 30*.

> confess God is 'one' in number, which is much more justifiable to the mind of the simple: that He is invisible, unapproachable, inexplicable, great, fearsome, and victorious, of whose name one is in every way fearful, trembling, and shuddering.[79]

The argument from reason, therefore, turns out to be an appeal to the moral miracle that from all over the world all classes of people adhere to faith in Christ, even into Islamic times when the monotheistic faith of the Muslims in the one God, who is one in number, is, by Nonnus' own admission, "a tenet held by the mind, and extolled by the thinking of everyman".[80] What is more, Nonnus goes on to say, Christians persist in a hard and difficult way of life, without the promise of heavenly rewards such as attract the others, who, as Nonnus says are,

> Those who will have rivers of delicacies, couches where they are not sated, and a new creation of women, whose birth is not from Adam and Eve.[81]

The allusion to Islamic descriptions of paradise, such as are found already in the *Qur'ān* (*at-Tawbah*, IX:72; *ad-Duḫān*, XLIV:51-56) are unmistakeable in this passage. And Nonnus admits their human, even rational appeal. Yet, he argues that with the Christians there is something more powerful and more compelling than these natural attractions, "which overpowers even the mind and the thinking, or rather it calms and presses it to docility".[82] And this something is the power of miracles. As Nonnus puts it, the power is this, "the working of the miracles and the feats, and the cures, which are themselves beyond rationality and thinking. They were accomplished in the name of Jesus the Nazorean".[83] And Nonnus means to include here the miracles recorded outside the scriptures connected with the spread of Christianity. "These are the sorts of things we Christians put forward", Nonnus says, "for those who contend against the holy scriptures".[84] And he asks, "With these things, who is the wise and just man who would not testify that truth belongs to the Gospel, be he Jew or

[79]Van Roey, *Nonnus de Nisibe*, 31*.
[80]Van Roey, *Nonnus de Nisibe*, 31*.
[81]Van Roey, *Nonnus de Nisibe*, 31*.
[82]Van Roey, *Nonnus de Nisibe*, 32*.
[83]Van Roey, *Nonnus de Nisibe*, 32. Here, and elsewhere in the latter part of the treatise, Nonnus uses this relatively uncommon epithet of Jesus, "the Nazorean (*nōṣrōyô*)". It puts one in mind of the Islamic name for the Christians, particularly in the *Qur'ān*, *nasrānī* (pl. *nasārā*). On the term, see Horovitz, J., *Koranische Untersuchungen* (Berlin, 1926), 144-146; Jeffery, A., *The Foreign Vocabulary of the Qur'ān* (Baroda, 1938), 280-281.
[84]Van Roey, *Nonnus de Nisibe*, 32*.

ḥanpô, and that it alone is God's complete scripture?"[85]

As for the Jews, Nonnus goes on to say that there are many childish things in the Old Testament, suitable to the temperament of the Jews, and that the spiritual realities, such as the kingdom of God for the righteous and Gehenna for the evil, are not even mentioned there because of the Jews' need for material blessings like the land, or for material threats, like the loss of the land. And Nonnus says, "This should be sufficient to convince the Jew that yet another scripture was therefore required for him and for the world".[86]

The case is similar with the *ḥanpê*, Nonnus argues, because he sees in their religion a reversion to a childishness that is even more childish than that of the Jews. It is, says Nonnus, "a milk that is weaker and thinner, not to mention other things that it is not safe to talk about, in which there is a contrary stance against the two scriptures, i.e., the two testaments, and even against nature and sober thinking".[87]

Nonnus' conclusion to the elaborate if simple-minded argument he has constructed is to say,

> A man will not go far off from the truth, if he says that nature itself testifies to the truth of the Gospel and loves it.[88]

NONNUS AS APOLOGIST

Nonnus of Nisibis' 'Apologetic Treatise' is an intriguing document. It is also a difficult one to read. The Syriac diction Nonnus employs is dense and often idiosyncratic by comparison with the style of other Syriac writers. One almost has the impression that for Nonnus, Syriac is a second choice, at least as far as writing is concerned. And one recalls that as far as we now know, he did write at least one long work in Arabic, the "Commentary on the Gospel of John". Maybe he wrote in Arabic more easily. Moreover, the "Apologetic Treatise", together with the three other Syriac works which the unique manuscript contains, emanates from a special period in Nonnus' career, the time of his imprisonment. On this account as well, therefore, it may not be surprising that his writing is somewhat difficult and disjointed in its style.

From the brief review provided here of the apologetic arguments Nonnus presents in the 'Apologetic Treatise,' it is clear that in their contents they are

[85]Van Roey, *Nonnus de Nisibe*, 33*.

[86]Van Roey, *Nonnus de Nisibe*, 33*.

[87]Van Roey, *Nonnus de Nisibe*, 34*.

[88]Van Roey, *Nonnus de Nisibe*, 34*.

very schematic. They remind one of nothing so much as a set of notes for someone who will be engaged in arguments about religion. They sketch the lines of thought one might develop on the topics covered, without carrying them out in any detail. And Nonnus often contents himself with the assertion of his conclusions rather than demonstrating them in any convincing way, or even satisfactorily defining his terms. This is true even in the third and longest part of the treatise, in which Nonnus presents his most original contribution to the Christian/Muslim apologetic dialogue.

While the whole structure of the 'Apologetic Treatise' clearly reflects the intellectual milieu of the early period of the history of the Christian and Muslim *kalām* in the first Abbasid century, at least in terms of the order and development of the topics it addresses,[89] the truly original part of the argument, as we have said, is in Nonnus' use of the attributes, 'goodness', 'wisdom', 'power', and 'justice' as they may be ascribed to Christ, to contend that their high degree of realisation in him bespeaks his divinity. But even in this line of reasoning he declares his conclusions more than he argues for them. And for evidence he cites the Gospels and Christian articles of faith which could scarcely be expected to carry conviction with non-Christians. Nonnus himself seems to have been aware of this problem, because more than once, as we have noted, he makes a remark to the effect that adversaries should allow the Christians to argue on their own terms. This practice heightens the interpreter's perception that Nonnus' purpose is really not only to prove a point to the Muslims (or to the Jews) at second hand, through his readers' participation in Muslim/Christian dialogue. But he intends also, and perhaps just as much, to express basic Christian convictions in the methodological idiom of the *mutakallimūn*, who by his day were deep into the discussion of the grammatical and ontological implications of the affirmation of the divine attributes to be found in the scriptures.[90] Christian thinkers lost no time in building arguments based on the theoretical implications of the affirmation of the divine attributes to justify the doctrine of the Trinity. From the beginnings of Christian *kalām* in Arabic this was the case and it remained a standard feature in the apologetical discussions of the Trinity in Christian Arabic literature.[91]

In his 'Apologetic Treatise' Nonnus took the theology of the attributes a

[89]See the remarks of Pines, S., "Some Traits of Christian Theological Writing in Relation to Moslem *Kalām* and to Jewish Thought", *Proceedings of the Israel Academy of Sciences and the Humanities*, 5 (1976), esp. 112-113.

[90]See note 38 above.

[91]See Haddad, R., *La Trinité divine chez les théologiens arabes (750-1050)* (Paris, 1985).

step further in that he used it to argue for the divinity of Christ. But rather than functioning as an argument, at Nonnus' hands the consideration of the doctrine of the Incarnation from the perspective of four important scriptural attributes usually attributed to God, as they are ascribed to Christ, serves more as a theological reflection on the doctrine of the Incarnation than it does as a demonstration of it. Nevertheless, even in this mode, Nonnus' accomplishment is to have taken the influence of Islamic religious discourse a step further in the expression of Christian religious ideas. And to this extent he may be said to have made a contribution to that development of Christian doctrine which emerged from the efforts of Arabic (and Syriac) speaking Christians to express the truths of the faith in an intellectual world in which religious discourse was dominated by paradigms of thought generated from Islam. Actually, Nonnus was one of the first thinkers writing in Syriac to adopt such Islamically inspired modes of thought and expression.[92] For in Syriac, in contradistinction to Arabic, Christian apologists were not faced with the necessity of responding to Islam in a new idiom, of which the religious vocabulary was already in some sense co-opted by the *Qur'ān*. Perhaps Nonnus' long experience as a controversialist in the Islamic milieu prior to his imprisonment, in association with such Arabic writers as Abū Rā'iṭah and Abū Qurrah, predisposed him to adopt their approach, and particularly that of Abū Rā'iṭah, when he came to write his own apology. And perhaps at that time too his choice of Syriac was dictated more from considerations of safety,[93] given the repressions initiated by al-Mutawakkil, than by any real preference to discuss issues arising from the Muslim/Christian dialogue in Syriac. It would have been otherwise with the other three works contained in the manuscript together with the 'Apologetic Treatise'. They were all on topics which concerned inner Christian issues, more easily discussed in the accustomed ecclesiastical language than in Arabic, and for which there would be no pressing need to reflect the idiom and the modes of thought of the *mutakallimūn*.

Another notable feature of Nonnus' apology for the doctrines of the Trinity and the Incarnation is his insistence several times in the text that their credibility can be shown from reason and from "commonly received

[92]For a general review of Syriac apologetical texts in response to Islam, see Griffith, S.H., "Disputes with Muslims in Syriac Christian Texts: from Patriarch John III (d. 648) to Bar Hebraeus (d. 1286)", to appear in the proceedings of the Wolfenbütteler Symposion, "Religionsgespräche im Mittelalter", 11-15 June, 1989.

[93]Nonnus actually cited the safety issue toward the end of his treatise. See the passage quoted at note 87 above.

ideas (*maḥshbōtô gawwōnōyōtô*)",[94] a concern which again echoes the thought of Theodore Abū Qurrah.[95] But whereas Abū Qurrah actually composed a treatise in Arabic designed to make his case largely on the basis of reason,[96] Nonnus is content in the 'Apologetic Treatise' to pay only lip service to the argument from reason alone. Undoubtedly he was aware of Abū Rā'iṭah's hesitations on this score and, like Abū Rā'iṭah, he in fact rested his case on the evidentiary power of miracles as the best argument for the credibility of the basic Christian articles of faith.[97]

Similarly, again like the contemporary apologists who wrote in Arabic, in the 'Apologetic Treatise' Nonnus set up some comparisons between Christianity and the other contemporary religions.[98] But again, unlike Abū Qurrah, who in one work more or less fairly set forth the tenets of the other religious communities from a rationalist perspective,[99] Nonnus, not unlike Abū Rā'iṭah, uses them first to testify to Christian tenets, and then as foils against which to argue on behalf of the superiority of Christianity, largely in moral terms, as we have seen.

In conclusion, one may say first of all about Nonnus' 'Apologetic Treatise' in Syriac that on every page it reflects the milieu of Islam, and of the intellectual concerns of the *mutakallimūn*, a point that one is now in a better position to appreciate than Van Roey was in 1948 when he published his excellent edition and study of the work. Secondly, it is clear that Nonnus intended to argue in Syriac on the model of the apologies of the contemporary Christian controversialists who wrote in Arabic, Abū

[94]Van Roey, *Nonnus de Nisibe*, 6* & 21*.

[95]See the appeal for proof, "ἐκ κοινῶν καὶ ὁμολογουμένων ἐννοιῶν", in Abū Qurrah's Greek *opusculum* XXII, *PG*, vol. 97, col. 1553A.

[96]This is Abū Qurrah's Arabic tract "On the Existence of the Creator and the True Religion", published by Dick, I., *Théodore Abūqurra, traité de l'existence du createur et de la vraie religion* (Patrimoine Arabe Chretien, 3, Jounieh and Rome 1982). An English translation and a commentary on the text is available in Khoury, G.H., "Theodore Abū Qurrah (c.750-820): Translation and Critical Analysis of his 'Treatise on the Existence of the Creator and on the True Religion'", (Ph.D. Dissertation, The Graduate Theological Union, Berkeley, Calif., 1990; Ann Arbor, Michigan, University Microfilms, 1991, no. 9100373.. See also Griffith, S.H., "Faith and Reason in Christian Kalām: Theodore Abū Qurrah on Discerning the True Religion", to appear in the proceedings of the First Woodbrooke Mingana Symposium on "Christian Arabic Apologetic Texts during the Abbasid Period 750-1258", 23-26 May 1990.

[97]See Abū Rā'iṭah's position explored in Khalil, S., "Liberté religieuse et propagation de la foi chez les théologiens arabes chrétiens du ixᵉ siècle et en Islam", in *Witness of Faith in Life and Worship* (Tantur Yearbook, 1980-1981, Jerusalem, 1981), 97-121. See also Griffith, S.H., "Habīb ibn Ḥidmah Abū Rā'iṭah".

[98]See Griffith, S.H., "Comparative Religion in the Apologetics of the First Christian Arabic Theologians", *Proceedings of the PMR Conference*, 4 (1979), 63-87.

[99]See Monnot, G., "Abū Qurrah et la pluralité des religions", *Revue de l'Histoire des Religions*, 208 (1991), 49-71.

Qurrah, Abū Rā'iṭah, and 'Ammār al-Baṣrī. But in Syriac Nonnus gives the impression of being less intellectually rigorous, more schematic, and in the end more inclined to rely on traditional modes of thought and expression than did his colleagues who had to argue for the credibility of Christianity in a language in which the very terms of the discussion were already predetermined by Islam.

Disputes with Muslims in Syriac Christian Texts: from Patriarch John (d. 648) to Bar Hebraeus (d. 1286)

When the Muslims came to power in Mesopotamia (al-Jazīrah and al-ᶜIrāq) in the heart of the territories of the Syriac-speaking Christian communities of the patriarchate of Antioch, and established at Baṣrah and Kufa the Arab communities that would be the centers of Islamic power in the vast territories of the former Persian empire, the stage was set for confrontations over religion to erupt between Christian and Muslim intellectuals[1]. For Baṣrah and Kufa, together with Baghdad somewhat later, were to become intellectual centers of the first order in the academic awakening of Islam, especially during the first Abbasid century[2]. And these metropolises were all within the territory of the Nestorian *catholicos* of Seleucia/Ctesiphon and the Jacobite metropolitan (later *maphrian*) of Tagrit, the two Christian regional hierarchs in the Syriac-speaking communities of the area with the most over-all influence[3]. Within these ecclesiastical jurisdictions in the seventh century there were already in place those institutions of the scholarly life that could not but be both magnet and foil for the first generations of Muslim intellectuals in Iraq[4]. Logic, science, philosophy, and religious dialectics all came

1 See F. McGraw Donner, *The Early Islamic Conquests* (Princeton, 1981); M. G. Morony, *Iraq after the Muslim Conquest* (Princeton, 1984). For guidance to the earlier Christian history of the area see J. M. Fiey, *Jalons pour une Histoire de l'Église en Iraq* (CSCO, vol. 310; Louvain, 1970), and for northern Mesopotamia, *idem, Assyrie Chrétienne* (3 vols.; Louvain, 1965 - 1968).

2 Still classic studies are L. Massignon, *La Passion d'al-Ḥosayn ibn Mansour al-Hallāj, martyr mystique de l'Islam* (2 vols.; Paris, 1922); C. Pellat, *Le milieu baṣrien et la formation de Ǧāḥiẓ* (Paris, 1953); W. Montgomery Watt, *The Formative Period of Islamic Thought* (Edinburgh, 1973).

3 See J. M. Fiey, "Tagrît, esquisse d'histoire chrétienne", *L'Orient Syrien* 8 (1963), pp. 289 - 342; *idem*, "Les étapes de la prise de conscience de son identité patriarchale par l'église syrienne orientale", *L'Orient Syrien* 12 (1967), pp. 1 - 22. See the collection of this author's studies in J. M. Fiey, *Communautés syriaques en Iran et Irak des origines à 1552* (London, 1979). See also J. M. Fiey, *Chrétiens syriaques sous les Abbasides* (CSCO, vol. 420; Louvain, 1980).

4 On the school system within the Syriac-speaking communities, see A. Vööbus, *History of the School of Nisibis* (CSCO, vol. 266; Louvain, 1965); R. Macina, "L'homme à l'école de Dieu, d'Antioche à Nisibe ...", *Proche Orient Chrétien* 32 (1982), pp. 86 - 124, 263 - 301; 33 (1983), pp. 39 - 103. See also A. Mingana (ed.),

to their first flowering in Arabic in this milieu[5]. Altogether they posed the most comprehensive intellectual challenge to Christians since the days of Galen, Porphyry, Celsus, and the Roman emperor Julian[6].

Responses to the Islamic challenge from the Christian communities who spoke Syriac appear in the surviving documents of a number of genres of writing. Historians chronicled the conquests and military occupation of the Arabs, and gave some accounts of the origins and basic tenets of Islam[7]. Preachers, epistolographers and Bible commentators took such notice of the teachings of Islam as their own topics seemed to require[8]. Some writers composed apocalyptic treatises that tried to make sense of the hegemony of Islam from the perspective of the traditional Christian readings of the prophecies of Daniel[9]. And some controversialists wrote apologetic and

Encyclopaedia of Philosophical and Natural Sciences as Taught in Baghdad about A. D. 817; or, a Book of Treasures by Job of Edessa (Cambridge, 1935).

5 Among the many sources one might cite, the following will be useful: M. Meyerhof, "New Light on Ḥunain ibn Isḥâq and his Period", *Isis* 8 (1926), pp. 685 - 724; D. E. O'Leary, *How Greek Science Passed to the Arabs* (London, 1949); R. Walzer, *Greek into Arabic; Essays in Islamic Philosophy* (Oxford, 1962); D. Gutas, "Paul the Persian on the Classification of the Parts of Aristotle's Philosophy: a Milestone between Alexandria and Baghdad", *Der Islam* 60 (1983), pp. 231 - 267.

6 P. de Labriolle, *Le réaction païenne; étude sur la polémique antichrétienne* du Ier au VIe siècle (2nd ed.; Paris, 1948); R. L. Wilken, *The Christians as the Romans Saw Them* (New Haven, 1984).

7 See C. Cahen, "Fiscalité, propriété, antagonismes sociaux en Haute-Mesopotamie au temps des premiers ʿAbbāsides d'après Denys de Tell-Mahré", *Arabica* 1 (1954), pp. 136 - 152; J. B. Segal, "Syriac Chronicles as Source Material for the History of Islamic Peoples", in B. Lewis & P. M. Holt (eds.), *Historians of the Middle East* (London, 1962), pp. 246 - 258; M. Benedicte Landron, "Les relations originelles entre Chrétiens de l'est (Nestoriens) et Musulmans", *Parole de l'Orient* 10 (1981 - 1982), pp. 191 - 222; J. Moorhead, "The Monophysite Response to the Arab Invasions", *Byzantion* 51 (1981), pp. 579 - 591; S. P. Brock, "Syriac Views of Emergent Islam", in G. H. A. Juynboll (ed.), *Studies on the First Century of Islamic Society* (Carbondale, Ill., 1982), pp. 9 - 21, 199 - 203 (notes); B. Spuler, "La 'Sīra' du prophète Mahomet et les conquêtes des arabes dans le Proche-Orient d'après les sources syriaques", in T. Fahd (ed.), *La vie du prophète Mahomet; colloque de Strasbourg, octobre 1980* (Paris, 1983), pp. 87 - 97; S. P. Brock, "North Mesopotamia in the Late Seventh Century; Book XV of John bar Penkāyê's *Rīš Mellē*", *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 9 (1987), pp. 51 - 75.

8 For example, Jacob of Edessa (633 - 708), refers to the Muslims in a letter on the genealogy of the Virgin Mary. See F. Nau, "Traduction des lettres XII et XIII de Jacques d'Édesse", *Revue de l'Orient Chrétien* 10 (1905), pp. 197 - 208, 258 - 282. Ishoʿyaw the Great (580 - 659) speaks briefly of the Muslims in a letter. See H. Suermann, "Orientalische Christen und der Islam; christliche Texte aus der Zeit von 632 - 750", *Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft und Religionswissenschaft* 67 (1983), pp. 128 - 131.

9 See the following works, in which copious bibliographies appear: A. Abel, "L'apo-

polemical tracts in Syriac that addressed themselves to arguments about religion between Christians and Muslims[10]. This latter genre of writing is the subject of the present essay.

Dialogue with Muslims, at least as a literary form of Christian apologetics, was not so popular a genre with Syriac writers as it was to become among Arabophone Christian scholars, who in tandem with the Muslim *mutakallimūn* developed their own rather carefully constructed *ʿilm al-kalām* in defense of Christian doctrines[11]. Nevertheless, from just after the time of the Islamic conquest, up to the days of Gregory Abū l-Farāj, Bar Hebraeus (d. 1286), after which Syriac virtually disappeared as a literary language, some Syriac writers did compose apologetical tracts in response to the challenge of Islam. Here we may give a brief account of the most important ones among those that have survived, several of which are still unpublished. Then we shall discuss the general features of the disputes with Muslims in these works, with a view to comparing them with similar texts in the other language communities of medieval Christianity in which disputes with Muslims also appear.

calypse de Baḥîra et la notion islamique de Mahdî", *Annuaire de l'Institut de Philologie et d'Histoire Orientales* 3 (1935), pp. 1 - 12; F. J. Martinez, "Eastern Christian Apocalyptic in the Early Muslim Period: Pseudo-Methodius and Pseudo-Athanasius", (Ph.D. Dissertation, The Catholic University of America; Washington, D.C., 1985); *idem*, "The Apocalyptic Genre in Syriac: the World of Pseudo-Methodius", in H. J. W. Drijvers *et al.* (eds.), *IV Symposium Syriacum 1984* (Orientalia Christiana Analecta, 229; Rome, 1987), pp. 337 - 352; H. Suermann, *Die geschichtstheologische Reaktion auf die einfallenden Muslime in der edessenischen Apokalyptik des 7. Jahrhunderts* (Frankfurt a. M., 1985); *idem*, "Der byzantinische Endkaiser bei Pseudo-Methodios", *Oriens Christianus* 71 (1987), pp. 140 - 155; G. J. Reinink, "Pseudo-Methodius und die Legende vom römischen Endkaiser", in W. Verbeke *et al.* (eds.), *The Use and Abuse of Eschatology in the Middle Ages* (Leuven, 1988), pp. 82 - 111.

10 See L. Sākō, "Bibliographie du dialogue islamo-chrétien: auteurs chrétiens de langue syriaque", *Islamochristiana* 10 (1984), pp. 273 - 292. One must use this essay with care, due to a number of errors in the reporting of the bibliographical information.

11 See the bibliographical surveys in successive issues of *Islamochristiana*, starting with R. Caspar *et al.*, "Bibliographie du dialogue islamo-chrétien; auteurs et œuvres du VIIe au Xe siècle", *Islamochristiana* 1 (1975), pp. 131 - 181. Two general essays that survey Christian Arabic *kalām* are: Samir Khalil, "La tradition arabe chrétienne et la chrétienté de Terre-Sainte", in D.-M. A. Jaeger (ed.), *Tantur Papers on Christianity in the Holy Land* (Jerusalem, 1981), pp. 343 - 432; R. Haddad, *La Trinité divine chez les théologiens arabes (750 - 1050)* (Paris, 1985).

I. *The Apologists and their Works*

There are eight Syriac writers whose apologetical compositions will repay closer study for the purposes of the present essay. It will be helpful to introduce these texts, with a brief review of each one of them. But first a general statement is in order about the topics they discuss and the genres in which they appear[12]. Since the topics in particular quickly became standard, one may mention them at the outset to avoid the necessity of repeating them eight times over. The real interest in each work is then to observe how the individual writer deals with the topics.

A. Topics and Genres

The topical agenda of the religious disputes with Muslims in Syriac are set under two basic headings: doctrinal claims and religious practices. In the area of doctrinal claims the writers are first of all concerned to provide a defense from scripture and from reason in favor of the veracity of the two basic Christian teachings the *Qur'ān* seems manifestly to deny: the Trinity and the Incarnation[13]. Secondly, there are several doctrinal issues important to Christians that statements in the *Qur'ān* or early Muslim teaching seem to compromise, or that early Muslim polemicists attacked. These are such matters as the integrity and the authenticity of the Old and the New Testaments as the Christian communities actually have them in hand[14]; the Christian doctrine of the moral freedom of the will to choose good and to avoid evil; the true significance and the real effects of Christian sacraments, such as Baptism and the Eucharist. Also in the area of doctrinal issues are questions about Muhammad's status as a prophet, and the position of the *Qur'ān* as a scripture, or book of revelations from God. Christians in the Syriac-speaking world had to have ready to hand clear answers to queries from Muslims on the latter two points, without lapsing into polemics or disrespectful language, and yet remain true to their own convictions[15].

12 See the brief statement by Louis R. Sako, "Les genres littéraires syriaques dans l'apologétique chrétienne vis-à-vis des musulmans", in Drijvers, *IV Symposium Syriacum 1984*, pp. 383 - 385.

13 *Qur'ān* passages cited in the Christian texts are such as *an-Nisā'* IV: 171; *al-Mā'idah* V: 73 & 75.

14 This issue reflects the Islamic claim that Jews and Christians have distorted the scriptures. See now J.-M. Gaudeul & R. Caspar, "Textes de la tradition concernant le *taḥrīf* (falsification) des écritures", *Islamochristiana* 6 (1980), pp. 61 - 104.

15 See S. H. Griffith, "The Prophet Muḥammad, his Scripture and his Message according to the Christian Apologies in Arabic and Syriac from the First Abbasid Century", in T. Fahd (ed.), *La vie du prophète Mahomet; colloque de Strasbourg – 1980* (Paris, 1983), pp. 99 - 146. Insults to the prophet or the *Qur'ān* were serious offenses. See A. S. Tritton, *The Caliphs and their Non-Muslim Subjects; a Critical Study of the Covenant of ᶜUmar* (London, 1930), p. 12.

Public liturgical actions and other religious practices or ecclesiastical arrangements common among Christians that regularly appear as topics in the disputes are: the issue of the direction one should face to pray (*al-qiblah*)[16]; the Christian practice of venerating crosses and icons; marriage customs, such as monogamy versus polygamy; the matter of the several Christian denominations in the Islamic world, the Nestorians, the Jacobites, and the Melkites[17]. Almost all of these topics find some place in most of the disputes under review here.

It is clear from the mere list of them, and from the appearance of these same topics in all the works under discussion, that the disputed questions in these Syriac texts reflect the religious objections Muslims most commonly and most consistently voiced to Christians[18]. The writers composed their apologies to assure their Christian readers that there were effective answers to these objections, and to supply them with replies they might use in their own arguments about religion with neighboring Muslims, or perhaps to support wavering Christians on the point of conversion to Islam[19]. All the texts have about them the air of practical affairs. They supply ready answers rather than scholarly disquisitions on the subjects they discuss.

16 Questions about the *qiblah* are among the earliest issues between Muslims and Christians of which we have record. Jacob of Edessa (633 - 708) talked about it in a letter to a fellow Christian, preserved in MS BM Add. 12172, ff. 124r & v. See the entry in W. Wright, *Catalogue of Syriac Manuscripts in the British Museum* (3 vols.; London, 1870 - 1872), vol. II, p. 604.

17 Some Muslims tried to classify and describe the Christian communities. See A. Abel, "Abū ᶜIsā Muḥammad b. Harūn al-Warrāq, le livre pour la réfutation des trois sectes chrétienne", (Mimeo ed.; Bruxelles, 1949); J. Van Ess, *Frühe muᶜtazilitische Häresiographie; zwei Werke des Nāšiʾ al-Akbar* (Beirut, 1971).

18 On Muslim, anti-Christian apologetics and polemics see E. Fritsch, *Islam und Christentum im Mittelalter* (Breslau, 1930); D. Sourdel, "Un pamphlet musulman anonyme d'époque ᶜAbbaside contre les chrétiens", *Revue des Études Islamiques* 34 (1966), pp. 1 - 34. In connection with this Muslim pamphlet see also J. M. Gaudeul, "The Correspondence between Leo and ᶜUmar: ᶜUmar's Letter Re-discovered?" *Islamochristiana* 10 (1984), pp. 109 - 157. See also S. M. Stern, "Quotations from Apochryphal Gospels in ᶜAbd al-Jabbār", *The Journal of Theological Studies* 18 (1967), pp. 34 - 57; *idem*, "ᶜAbd al-Jabbār's Account of How Christ's Religion was Falsified by the Adoption of Roman Customs", *The Journal of Theological Studies* 19 (1968), pp. 128 - 185; D. Thomas, "Two Muslim-Christian Debates from the Early Shīᶜite Tradition", *Journal of Semitic Studies* 33 (1988), pp. 53 - 80.

19 Some Christians did waver, and some Muslims did try to induce doubt in the minds of Christians. Such was the avowed purpose of the Syriac-speaking convert to Islam, ᶜAlī ibn-Rabbān aṭ-Ṭabarī, a former Nestorian who became a Muslim between 838 and 848. See A. Khalifé & W. Kutsch, "Ar-radd ᶜala-n-Naṣārā de ᶜAlī aṭ-Ṭabarī", *Mélanges de l'Université de Saint-Joseph* 36 (1959), pp. 115 - 148. See Griffith, "The Prophet Muḥammad", pp. 112 - 113.

The literary forms of the dispute texts are basically two. First, there are accounts of dialogues or debates in which a Christian churchman responds to provocative questions put to him by a Muslim official, or alternatively there is a dialogue between a master and his pupil in which the latter poses the questions a Muslim might ask. Secondly, there are the letter-treatises or essays on the standard topics of controversy that a writer has composed in a more discursive style, usually in response to the request of someone else. The writer commonly introduces the composition in a preface that explains the circumstances that prompted him to write it. And from such a preface the modern researcher can sometimes glean useful historical information about relations between Christians and Muslims at a particular time and place[20].

On the subject of the literary genres of the dispute texts, one of the most interesting questions concerns the historicity of the dialogues or debates the texts report. While the debate scenario is not of itself an unlikely *Sitz im Leben* for controversies between Muslim and Christian scholars[21], or even between a Christian religious leader and a Muslim official, one can hardly maintain that the Syriac texts are verbatim transcripts of such dialogues. The Syriac language itself precludes this possibility. Christians spoke Arabic, but one knows of no Muslims who learned Syriac for the purpose of arguing with Christians[22]. Furthermore, the very likelihood of actual arguments about religion between Muslims and Christians, be they official or not, is the social circumstance that stands behind the popularity of the dialogue as a literary form. But even in those instances in which one does find grounds for upholding the historicity of a particular dialogue encounter, the report of it as a piece of Syriac religious literature came to have a life of its own that went well beyond the parameters of any likely historical conversation. The account of the debate was a piece of apologetic literature that in Syriac was intended

20 See the interesting study by Eva Riad, *Studies in the Syriac Preface* (Uppsala, 1988), in which she discusses the work of Theodore bar Kônî on pp. 157 - 172.

21 One thinks of the *ʿilm al-kalām* in this context, not an undertaking limited to Muslims. For further remarks and bibliography, see S. H. Griffith, "The First Christian *Summa Theologiae* in Arabic: Christian *Kalām* in Ninth Century Palestine", in M. Gervers & R. J. Bikhazi (eds.), *Conversion and Continuity; Indigenous Christian Communities in Islamic Lands, Eighth to Eighteenth Centuries* (papers in Mediaeval Studies, 9; (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1990), pp. 15 - 31. The *ʿilm al-kalām* had one of its ancestors in the Syriac-speaking world. See M. Cook, "The Origins of Kalām", *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 43 (1980), pp. 32 - 43.

22 It is not to be assumed that no Muslims learned enough Syriac to consult the Bible in that language. See S. H. Griffith, "The Gospel in Arabic: an Inquiry into its Appearance in the First Abbasid Century", *Oriens Christianus* 69 (1985), pp. 126 - 167. There is a report that one companion of the prophet, ʿAbd Allāh ibn ʿAmr ibn al-ʿĀṣ, read Syriac. See the citations in N. Abbott, *Studies in Arabic Literary Papyri* (vol. II, Qur'ānic Commentary and Tradition; Chicago, 1967), p. 9 & n. 43.

for Christian eyes alone. The Christian spokesman does all the significant talking, while the Muslim partner asks leading questions.

Finally, one must note that there are no real polemics in the Syriac dispute texts under review here. The purpose of the writers was to commend the Christian faith, not to attack Islam. The coming of Muslim rule is often portrayed in Syriac texts, particularly histories, as due to sins in the Christian community[23]. Some works explain distinctive Islamic teachings that are objectionable to Christians as due to the influences of Jews or errant Christian monks on Muḥammad or the early Muslims[24]. Other passages attempt to offer a positive assessment of Muḥammad or the *Qur'ān*, without admitting that the former is a prophet or God's messenger or that the latter is divine revelation[25]. But there is no advice given in the dispute texts on how the reader might discredit Islam.

B. Texts

1. *Patriarch John and ʿUmayr ibn Saʿd al-Anṣarī (c. 644)*

The earliest Syriac dispute text is the one that gives an account of the interrogation of the Jacobite patriarch of Antioch John III (d. 648) by the Muslim emir ʿUmayr ibn Saʿd, in the environs of Ḥomṣ on Sunday, 9 May 644[26]. The emir questioned the patriarch about the one Gospel and the several communities of Christians, about the doctrines of the Trinity and the Incarnation, and about how one determines the laws that govern behavior in the Christian community.

The account of this interrogation is preserved in a collection of Syriac documents assembled in a single manuscript under the date of 17 August 874[27]. Otherwise, one hears nothing of it in Syriac sources until the 12th/13th

23 In Jacobite and Nestorian texts the sins are usually ascribed to Byzantine rulers and churchmen. See Brock, "Syriac Views"; *idem*, "North Mesopotamia".

24 See, e. g., R. Gottheil, "A Christian Bahira Legend", *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie* 13 (1898), pp. 189 - 242; 14 (1899), pp. 203 - 268; 15 (1900), pp. 56 - 102; 17 (1903), pp. 125 - 166.

25 See Griffith, "The Prophet Muḥammad".

26 For the text and a French translation, see F. Nau, "Un colloque du patriarche Jean avec l'émir des Agaréens", *Journal Asiatique* 11th series 5 (1915), pp. 225 - 279. A German translation and commentary is available in H. Suermann, "Orientalische Christen und der Islam; christliche Texte aus der Zeit von 632 - 750", *Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft und Religionswissenschaft* 67 (1983), pp. 122 - 128. On the date and the *dramatis personae* see Kh. Samir, "Qui est l'interlocuteur musulman du patriarche syrien Jean III (631 - 648)?" in Drijvers, *IV Symposium Syriacum – 1984*, pp. 387 - 400. Independently of Kh. Samir, two British scholars identified ʿUmayr b. Saʿd al-Anṣarī as the emir and dated the colloquy to 644. See P. Crone & M. Cook, *Hagarism, the Making of the Islamic World* (Cambridge, 1977), pp. 162, n. 11.

27 See the description of the MS and its contents in W. Wright, *Catalogue*, vol. II, pp. 989 - 1002. The colloquy text is no. 88, p. 998.

century, when the west Syrian historians, Michael the Syrian and Bar Hebraeus among them, tell the story of the meeting. In the MS the account appears under the following heading, "The Letter of Mār John the Patriarch about the conversation he had with the emir of the *Mhaggrāyê*."[28] In fact the letter is by someone else who is reporting the conversation. He seems to speak in behalf of the patriarch's Holy Synod[29].

The immediate occasion of the letter is the writer's desire to allay the church's anxiety about the patriarch's summons to appear before the emir. The introductory paragraph says:

> Because we know you are apprehensive and fearful for us, due to this business for the sake of which we were summoned to this district ... we are informing you, beloved Sirs, that on the 9th of this month of *Iyyōr* (May), on Sunday, we entered the presence of the illustrious commander, the emir, and the blessed father of the community was interrogated by him.[30]

Then comes the account of the emir's questions and the patriarch's replies. There is nothing unexpected in the apologetic stance the patriarch adopts. But there are several interesting details in the account to repay the historian's attention. For example, the text says that in addition to the patriarch's entourage there were some Muslims present who were prepared to inspect the Greek and Syriac scriptures the patriarch had put forward in evidence to support his arguments. And the emir is said to have summoned a Jew to testify that these texts in no way distorted the Torah[31]. Furthermore, the text notes that Christians from three Arab groups were present: Tanūkh, Ṭayy, and people from ʿAqūl (Kūfa, near Ḥīra)[32]. Right after this notice the emir says: "I want you to do one of three things: either show me your own proper laws that

28 See Nau, "Un colloque", p. 248; Wright, *Catalogue*, vol. II, p. 998. On the term *Mhaggrāyê* see below, n. 72.

29 Members of the synod are named at the end of the text. See Nau, "Un colloque", p. 253. Among them is a certain Severus, whom Syriac sources claim was the patriarch's secretary. See Samir, "Qui est l'interlocuteur", p. 388 & n. 4.

30 Nau, "Un colloque", p. 248. In the text, the patriarch's name and honorifics appear intrusively in the space where the ellipsis appears in the quotation.

31 Nau, "Un colloque", p. 251. In the 12th century Michael the Syrian reported that the emir on this occasion ordered an Arabic translation of the Gospel, to be done with the help of bi-lingual Christian Arab tribesmen, concerning whom see below, n. 32. See Griffith, "The Gospel in Arabic", pp. 135 - 137. On the *topos* of the Jewish testimony to the integrity of the text of Christian Bible citations, see S. H. Griffith, "Jews and Muslims in Christian Syriac and Arabic Texts of the Ninth Century CE", *Jewish History*, 3 (1988), pp. 65 - 94.

32 Nau, "Un colloque", p. 251. A century earlier, the Jacobite metropolitan Aḥudemmeh had evangelized these same tribes. See F. Nau, "Histoires d'Ahoudemmeh et de Marouta", *Patrologia Orientalis* 3 (1909), p. 28. See I. Shahid, *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Fourth Century* (Washington, 1984), pp. 420 - 422; J. B. Segal, "Arabs in Syriac Literature Before the Rise of Islam", *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 4 (1984), pp. 89 - 123, esp. 103 - 105.

are written in the Gospel and be governed by them, or submit to the law of Islam."[33]

Finally, the text mentions the Chalcedonians in the Syriac-speaking community, whom the writer claims were also praying for the patriarch, and who asked him to speak on behalf of the whole Christian community in the face of the threatening danger[34].

2. *The Monk of Bēt Ḥālê and an Arab Notable (c. 720)*

Scholars have long known of an account of a "Disputation against the Arabs" featuring a monk named Abraham of the monastery of Bēt Ḥālê answering the questions and objections of a Muslim Arab about Christian doctrines and practices[35]. Until recently the text of the account has been inacessible to the scholarly community. However, a microfilm copy of it was secured in the mid-seventies, and soon a scientific edition, translation and commentary on the text will appear under the direction of Prof. Han J. W. Drijvers of Groningen University, the Netherlands[36].

There are two uncertainties about the encounter the text reports, assuming the authenticity and the integrity of the text in the rather late manuscript copy of it that is available: the location of Bēt Ḥālê, and the date of the encounter. The present writer is inclined to the view that the most likely location is the site known as Dayr Mār ʿAbdâ near Kufa and Ḥira in Iraq[37]. For in the preface, the monk says that his Muslim dalogue partner was an Arab notable in the entourage of the emir Maslama. One thinks immediately of Maslama ibn ʿAbd al-Malik, who was governor for a brief time in Iraq in the early 720's, a circumstance that suggests both a place and a date for the encounter, both of which are plausible[38].

33 One notices that only two options are given, although three are mentioned. Perhaps the writer has in mind the three conditions said to have been put to the *ahl al-kitāb* at the conquest: to convert, to pay the *ǧizyah* and become *ahl adh-dhimmah*, or to fight to the finish. See the introductory discussion in A. Fattal, *Le statut légal des non-musulmans en pays d'islam* (Beyrouth, 1958), pp. 5 - 18.

34 Nau, "Un colloque", pp. 252 - 253.

35 See the notice of ʿAbdîshôʿ bar Brîkâ in J. S. Assemani, *Bibliotheca Orientalis* (vol. III, pt. 1; Rome, 1735), p. 205. Diyarbekir Syriac MS 95, a MS of the early 18th century containing a copy of the 'Disputation' is described in A. Scher, "Notice sur les manuscrits syriaques et arabes conservés à l'archevêche chaldéen de Diarbekir", *Journal Asiatique* 10th series 10 (1907), pp. 395 - 398. The "Disputation" is no. 35 of 43 entries, p. 398.

36 See P. Jager, "Intended Edition of a Disputation between a Monk of the Monastery of Bet Ḥale and One of the Ṭayoye", in Drijvers, *IV Symposium Syriacum – 1984*, pp. 401 - 402. Through the kindness of Prof. Drijvers I have been able to read a copy of the text of the "Disputation" from Diyarbekir MS 95.

37 See J. M. Fiey, *Assyrie Chrétienne* (vol. III; Beyrouth, 1968), p. 223.

38 See H. Lammens, "Maslama ibn ʿAbdalmalik", *EI*[1], vol. III, pp. 447 - 448.

The topics of the dialogue are the standard ones for the most part, but the text is very interesting because of its unique features. The writer shows an unusual familiarity with Islam. He quotes the *Qur'ān* and names several *surahs*, although he seems to think the latter are separate from the *Qur'ān*[39]. He quotes a tradition from Muḥammad that speaks favorably of monks and hermits[40]. He knows the story of Baḥīrā, whom the Christians call Sargīs[41]. There is an extended discussion of the Christian practice of venerating icons, crosses and martyrs' bones that is unusual in the surviving Syriac dispute texts. The author even explicitly mentions the icon of Christ in Edessa that tradition claimed Jesus sent to king Abgar[42].

The circumstances of the dialogue that the author mentions in the preface are instructive. The Muslim notable was in the monastery for ten days because of sickness. He was a man interested in religion, "learned in our scriptures as well as in their *Qur'ān*", the author says. At first he spoke with the monks only through an interpreter, as was proper because of his high position in government. And the monk reports that for his part, in discussions about religion with such people, his own custom was to prefer silence to forthrightness. But in this discussion, honesty and love for the truth was to prevail, the author says, and the dialogue went forward without the services of the interpreter. One supposes the conversation was in Arabic, although the account of it is in Syriac.

The text is Christian apologetics pure and simple. In the preface the author says that he is responding to the request of a certain Father Jacob for an account of:

> our investigation into the apostolic faith at the instance of a son of Ishmaᶜel. And since it seems to me it would be profitable to you to bring it to the attention of your brethren, and because I know it will be useful to you, I am going to set it down in 'Question' and 'Answer' format[43].

The Arab notable then poses the questions, and the monk answers with long explanations of Christian beliefs and practices. At the end, the Arab says, "I

39 He alludes to *an-Nisā'* IV:171. He mentions *ṣûrat al-Baqarah* II, *G-y-g-y*, presumably the 'Spider', *ᶜAnkabût* XXIX, and *T-w-r-h*. On the significance of the apparent distinction between these *surahs* and the *Qur'ān* see Crone & Cook, *Hagarism*, pp. 17 - 18.

40 "Even Muḥammad our prophet said about the inhabitants of monasteries and the mountain dwellers that they will enjoy the kingdom". Diyarbekir MS 95, private typescript, p. 15. So far I have not found this tradition in an Islamic text.

41 See n. 24 above.

42 In these particulars the author's approach resembles that of Theodore Abū Qurrah. See Sidney H. Griffith, "Theodore Abū Qurrah's Arabic Tract on the Christian Practice of Venerating Images", *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 105 (1985), pp. 53 - 73.

43 All the quotations from the preface are from Diyarbekir MS 95, private typescript, pp. 1 - 2.

testify that were it not for the fear of the government and of shame before men, many would become Christians."[44]

3. *Theodore bar Kônî (c. 792)*

Theodore bar Kônî's *Scholion* is a summary presentation of Nestorian doctrine in the form of an extended commentary on the whole Christian Bible, the Old Testament and the New Testament. In the full edition of the work there are eleven chapters, the first nine of which follow the order of the biblical books, presenting doctrine in the catechetical style of questions posed by a student and answered by a master. The same literary style appears in chapter 10, which is in fact a Christian response to objections to Christian doctrines and practices customarily posed by Muslims. Chapter 11 is an appendix to the *Scholion*, being a list of heresies and heresiarchs, along with brief statements of their teachings[45].

Chapter 10 of the *Scholion* is an apology for Christianity in response to Islam[46]. In the preface to the chapter the writer states his purpose quite clearly. He provides the following title:

> An encounter (*'ārûᶜtâ*) in question and answer against those who while professing to accept the Old Testament, and acknowledging the coming of Christ our Lord, are far removed from both of them, and who demand from us an apology (*mappaqbrûhâ*) for our faith, not from all of the scriptures, but from those which they acknowledge.[47]

The preface goes on to address the chapter to the same 'Brother John' to whom the whole *Scholion* is dedicated. The writer says that in the new chapter 10 he will employ the same literary form he used in the earlier chapters. He says of the new chapter that

> Although it is a full refutation against the *ḥanpê*, and a ratification of the faith, we are putting it in questions [and answers] according to our custom in the whole book; the student takes the part of the *ḥanpê*, and the teacher the part of the Christians.[48]

44 *Ibid.*, p. 16.

45 Text: A. Scher, *Theodorus bar Kônî Liber Scholiorum* (CSCO, vols. 55 & 69; Paris, 1910 & 1912). Versions: R. Hespel & R. Draguet, *Théodore Bar Koni Livre des Scolies* (2 vols., CSCO vols. 431 & 432; Louvain, 1981 & 1982). For the *Scholion* in another text tradition see R. Hespel, *Théodore Bar Koni, livre des scolies* (CSCO, vols. 447 & 448; Louvain, 1983). See also S. H. Griffith, "Theodore bar Kônî's *Scholion*: a Nestorian *Summa Contra Gentiles* from the First Abbasid Century", in N. Garsoïan et al. (eds.), *East of Byzantium: Syria and Armenia in the Formative Period* (Washington, 1982), pp. 53 - 72.

46 See S. H. Griffith, "Chapter Ten of the *Scholion*: Theodore bar Kônî's Apology for Christianity", *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 47 (1981), pp. 158 - 188.

47 Scher, *Liber Scholiorum*, CSCO, vol. 69, p. 231.

48 *Ibid.*, p. 232. The *ḥanpê* here are the Muslims. The world usually means 'pagans' in Syriac. It is cognate to the Arabic term *ḥanîf* (pl. *ḥunafā'*). On the *double entendre* in Syriac see Griffith, "The Prophet Muḥammad", pp. 118 - 122.

One notices immediately that the author says that the disputation is a literary genre. He is not reporting an actual debate. He adopted this style, he explained earlier, to make things easier for beginning students. And this circumstantial detail calls attention to the fact that for the author of the *Scholion* a reasoned reply to the challenge of Islam was in his day a topic not to be missed in an introductory manual of theology. The dialogue style there fitted what one might call the writer's pastoral purpose.

The topics under discussion in chapter 10 are the standard ones and I have studied them elsewhere[49]. Here one might usefully call attention to the fact that Theodore bar Kônî presents Islam's challenge to Christians as being essentially a 'beclouded notion'[50] about what the Bible means. The proper meaning of the scriptures and the estimation of the status of God's messengers to mankind are in fact the *terminus a quo* of the disagreements between Muslims and Christians.

4. *Patriarch Timothy I (780 - 823)*

The most well known Syriac dispute text is no doubt the one that contains Patriarch Timothy's account of the replies he says he gave to the questions of the caliph al-Mahdī (775 - 785) on the occasion of two consecutive audiences the patriarch had with the caliph[51]. The questions all had to do with the standard topics of conversation between Muslims and Christians on religious matters. The caliph raises the standard Islamic objections to Christian doctrines and practices, and the patriarch provides suitable apologetic replies. In literary form, the patriarch's Syriac text is a letter to an unnamed correspondent[52]. The preface is in a florid style, and it is highly rhetorical, but not devoid of interest. In it Timothy voices some diffidence about the "vain labor" involved in such a composition, and he complains that he is carrying out the task of writing it, "not without difficulty, nor without unwillingness."[53]

What may have proved daunting to the patriarch was the knowledge that his best apologetic efforts would carry little conviction for Muslims, nor

49 See n. 46 above.
50 Scher, *Liber Scholiorum*, CSCO, vol. 69, p. 231.
51 A. Mingana, *Woodbrooke Studies; Christian Documents in Syriac, Arabic, and Garshuni, Edited and Translated with a Critical Apparatus* (vol. II; Cambridge, 1928), pp. 1 - 162. For a general study of Timothy and this dialogue, along with an edition, translation, and commentary on the Arabic translation, see Hans Putnam, *L'église et l'islam sous Timothée I (780 - 823)* (Beyrouth, 1975).
52 The letter-treatise was Timothy's preferred literary form. See O. Braun, *Timothei Patriarchea I Epistulae* (CSCO, vols. 74 & 75; Paris, 1914); R. Bidawid, *Les lettres du patriarche nestorian Timothy I* (Studi e Testi, 187; Citta del Vaticano, 1956). The dialogue with al-Mahdī is not published in these collections, although it is generally reckoned as letter no. 59.
53 Mingana, *Woodbrooke Studies*, II, p. 91.

would they do much to prevent upwardly mobile Christians from converting to Islam, especially from within the Nestorian community[54]. Several times in the report of the two sessions during which Timothy says he answered the caliph's questions, the writer alludes to the Muslim's desire for arguments from nature or from the scriptures, and his wariness of arguments based on reasoning processes, or of what one might call the logic-chopping rebuttals in debate style that were the apologists' stock in trade[55].

Nevertheless, Timothy's apologetical catechism was a success in the Christian community. Arabic versions of it were in wide circulation, and there was even a Syriac epitome of the report of the first session, in a simple question and answer format, that later came to be attributed to a certain Elias of Nisibis[56]. Still, there is something contrived about the dialogue. One need not doubt that Patriarch Timothy was in fact queried by the caliph about the tenets of Christianity to notice at the same time that the patriarch's account of his audience with al-Mahdī belongs to a familiar literary genre. It has an apologetical purpose that allows Timothy to relegate the caliph to the role of posing concise leading questions in the style of a disciple, while the patriarch answers them with a master's more discursive reply. It was already a familiar didactical literary genre in Syriac religious texts.

Together with the dialogue with al-Mahdī one must consider other compositions by Patriarch Timothy that also have the form of the epistolary treatise and that also answer the challenge of Islam[57]. Of particular importance in this regard is Letter 40 in the collected works of the patriarch[58]. Ostensibly it is an account of a discussion Timothy had with an Aristotelian philosopher at the caliph's court about the definitions of logical terms and their proper deployment in Christian theology. In fact the letter is an exercise in *kalām* of a sort that any *mutakallim*, Muslim or Christian, would readily recognize if it were in Arabic. In the introduction Timothy describes the Muslims as the "new Jews" in a passage that also fairly well describes his apologetic purpose. He says,

54 See L. Massignon, "La politique islamo-chrétienne des scribes nestoriens de Deir Qunna à la cour de Bagdad au IX s. de notre ère", in Y. Moubarac, *Opera Minora* t. I, pp. 250 - 257. See also Landron, "Les relations originelles".
55 See e. g., Mingana, *Woodbrooke Studies*, II, pp. 154 & 156.
56 See Putnam, *L'église et l'islam*; A. Van Roey, "Une apologie syriaque attribuée à Elie de Nisibe", *Le Muséon* 59 (1946), pp. 381 - 397.
57 See T. R. Hurst, "The Syriac Letters of Timothy I (727 - 823): a Study in Christian-Muslim Controversy", (Ph.D. Dissertation, The Catholic University of America; Washington, D. C., 1986).
58 See T. R. Hurst, "Letter 40 of the Nestorian Patriarch Timothy I (727 - 823): an edition and translation", (M. A. Thesis, The Catholic University of America; Washington, D. C., 1981); Hanna Cheikho, *Dialectique du langage sur Dieu de Timothée I (728 - 823) à Serge* (Rome, 1983).

> In the days of Herod, Pilate, and the old Jews there was both defeat and victory, and truth and falsehood. So also, now, in the days of the present princes, in our own time, and in the days of the new Jews among us, there is the same struggle and the same contest to distinguish falsehood and truth.[59]

What makes Letter 40 especially important in the present context is its topical outline. Not only are there a number of the standard topics of religious controversy between Muslims and Christians, but here one notices that the conversation begins with a discussion of the modes of human knowledge in general, and then moves on to a disquisition on the terms one uses to express his knowledge about God. In short, what one would much later call theodicy and the theory of knowledge have become important issues in the Christian response to Islam. In this approach one sees the ground-work not only of the typical *kalām* treatise[60], but it reveals Patriarch Timothy as a thinker on the order of John of Damascus or Theodore bar Kônî, who realize that the challenge of Islam requires a return to the basics. One sees here the apologetic origins of the *summae theologiae* in Christian literature.

A topic of particular importance to Timothy was the significance of Jesus' traditional title, 'Servant' (*ᶜabdâ, al-ᶜabd*). In Arabic, and in the *Qur'ān* in particular, this title indicates Jesus' full humanity, to the exclusion of any proper divinity (cf. *az-Zuhrūf* (43):57 - 61). Timothy was one of the few Christian apologists to address this issue. He devoted the bulk of his *Letter 34* to it, explicating the several senses of the term 'servant', and explaining how Christians use the title in a way that is fully compatible with their affirmation of Jesus' divinity[61].

Patriarch Timothy's letter-treatises are dispute texts for all practical purposes, but in fact only one person is really speaking – the author himself. This is a feature of the Syriac dispute texts in general that is particularly evident in Timothy's 'letters'. And it is a feature that nevertheless very well highlights the essentially dialectical character of apologetics, especially when there is no personally identifiable dialogue partner (e. g., an Aristotelian philosopher). Even when the partner is identifiable (e. g., the caliph al-Mahdī) one realizes that the author's voice is still paramount. The dialogue is not between individuals but between religious communities. The Syriac dispute texts are intended for the Christian participants in a much wider argument about religion than any given debate between scholars or churchmen and Muslim officials might indicate.

59 Hurst, "Letter 40", p. 48. On the epithet, "the new Jews", see Griffith, Jews and Muslims.

60 See S. Pines, "Some Traits of Christian Theological Writing in Relation to Moslem *Kalām* and to Jewish Thought", *Proceedings of the Israel Academy of the Sciences and the Humanities* 5 (1976), pp. 105 - 125.

61 See Hurst, "The Syriac Letters", pp. 43 - 60, 197 - 200.

5. *Nonnus of Nisibis (d.c. 870)*

Nonnus was a bilingual writer, with compositions in both Syriac and Arabic to his credit. He was an ecclesiastical controversialist in the service of the Monophysite community, whose characteristic teachings he energetically defended not only against Muslims, but against Melkites and Nestorians as well. The work in which he addressed himself to the intellectual challenge of Islam is a Syriac treatise that its modern editor calls simply "Le Traité Apologétique."[62] On internal, literary critical grounds, one must date the composition to a point between 850 and 870. A. Van Roey chose the narrower period between 858 and 862 as a more likely time frame within which Nonnus wrote the treatise, because during these years he was in prison in Samarra on the orders of the caliph al-Mutawakkil (d. 862). This caliph's relative intolerance for Christian controversialists, as well as for Muslim *mutakallimūn*, is the circumstance that for Van Roey most likely explains both why Nonnus' presumably Muslim interlocutor is anonymous, and why Nonnus adopts a notably conciliatory attitude toward Islam in the treatise[63].

Nonnus' treatise is not in the literary form of a dialogue, in spite of certain epistolary conventions at the outset. Rather, the work is an apologetical essay on the themes of monotheism, the doctrine of the Trinity, and the doctrine of the incarnation. The Islamic milieu in which the writer operates becomes evident in his manifest references to Islam, and in light of the general concerns of Christian and Muslim *mutakallimūn* of the period. By comparison to the Syriac dispute texts reviewed earlier, Nonnus' essay is almost in the style of a standard *kalām* text, including the typical phraseology left over from more blatantly dialectical times, "If someone should say ..., to him it should be said ...."[64]

The scope of the work is clearly stated in the title paragraph a later scribe set at the beginning of the text in the unique Syriac manuscript that contains the work, a manuscript brought to Egypt by Moses of Nisibis in the year 932, less than a century after its composition. The title paragraph says,

> An essay of Nonnus ... to a man who did not make known his name, who asked on what grounds do Christians prove to polytheists and renouncers of the holy scriptures that God is one, not many, and on what grounds they say this one is three and at the same time one – that is, one is three and three is one, not one and

62 See A. Van Roey, *Nonnus de Nisibe; traité apologétique* (Bibliothèque du Muséon, 21; Louvain, 1948). The fullest modern study of the life and works of Nonnus is the introduction to this edition and Latin translation of the apologetical treatise. See also, D. D. Bundy, "The Commentary of Nonnus of Nisibis on the Prologue of John", in Kh. Samir (ed.), *Actes du premier congrès international d'études arabes chrétiennes* (Orientalia Christiana Analecta, 218; Rome, 1982), pp. 123 - 133.

63 See Van Roey, *Nonnus de Nisibe*, pp. 45 - 46.

64 See, e. g., *ibid.*, p. 6*. On the significance of this terminology see Cook, "The Origins of *Kalām*".

> three, or three and one. Also, whether they can prove that the incarnation of the Word God, one of the holy Trinity, follows divinely appropriately.[65]

The title not only states the topics discussed in the treatise, but it also gives one a sense of the theological style. In fact, the doctrine of the incarnation is the principal topic. And it is in this connection that one finds the following statement referring to Islamic doctrine about Christ:

> The recent *Ḥanpê* are much more fair minded than the others, for they too acknowledge that he was born of the virgin, she being utterly chaste;* that he is the word and the spirit of God.* They add many more miracles, even that he is a creator, who created birds of clay,* just as he was creator for Adam originally. They acknowledge that he has ascended into heaven and that he is ready to come into the world again. And as giving special honor, they do not accept the fact that he was crucified and died.*[66]

One notices clear echoes of passages in the *Qur'ān* in this quotation. Subsequently in the treatise Nonnus brings up other matters that are clear allusions to Islam. In one place, for example, he calls attention both to the Gospel's affirmation that Jesus is God and to what the disciples called him in reference to his humanity, "a Nazarene (*nāṣrāyâ*) and a man sent by God."[67] A little later Nonnus has more to say about Jesus' name, "the Nazarene." And here one is reminded of the *Qur'ān*'s name for the Christians, who are more than a dozen times called "the Nazarenes" (*an-Naṣrā* > *nāṣrāyê*) in what seems to be an obvious reference to this name for Jesus. It seems likely that Nonnus had the *Qur'ān*'s name for Christians in mind when he set out to explain the name, "the Nazarene."[68]

Finally, Nonnus caricatures the *Qur'ān*'s description of paradise when he refers to the promises for the afterlife by which, he says, some adversaries seek to attract the allegiance of the simple minded, in contrast to the Gospel's sober promises for the future life. The false promises, says Nonnus, are of

> Rivers of fattening foods, along with time in bed, that do not satiate; a new creation of women whose birth is not from Adam and Eve – things known and acknowledged to incite carnal people.[69]

65 Van Roey, *Nonnus de Nisibe*, p. 1*.

66 *Ibid.*, p. 12*. On the term *ḥanpê* for Muslims, see n. 48 above. The asterisks in the quotation refer to allusions to the following passages in the *Qur'ān*, in the order in which they appear in the text: III *'Āl ᶜImrān* 47; IV *an-Nisā'* 171; III *'Āl ᶜImrān* 49; IV *an-Nisā'* 157.

67 Van Roey, *Nonnus de Nisibe*, p. 30*. The line is an allusion to Acts 2:22. As stated, in reference to Jesus' humanity, the line could express the Islamic point of view.

68 See Van Roey, *Nonnus de Nisibe*, p. 32*. In the *Qur'ān* the term *an-Naṣārā* occurs some 15 times to designate Christians.

69 *Ibid.*, p. 31*. The reference is to the *Qur'ān*'s descriptions of the garden of paradise and of the *houris*. See e. g., II *al-Baqarah* 25; LVI *al-Wāqiᶜah* 15 - 26.

In short, although Nonnus never explicitly addresses the Muslims in this apologetical treatise, the topics of the Islamic *ᶜilm al-kalām* appear in it, and he occasionally alludes to the *Qur'ān* or to Islamic teaching. The treatise is meant for the eyes of a Christian participant in the *kalām*.

6. *Moshe bar Kepha (d. 903)*

Moshe bar Kepha was an important figure in the life of the Monophysite community in Iraq in the ninth century, both as a Syriac writer and teacher, and as an ecclesiastical official. Although he did not write a dispute text against the Muslims, there has survived in the manuscripts attributed to him a work on free will and predestination that includes a chapter, full of arguments "Against the *Mhaggrāyê*, who also take away freedom, and say that good or evil is prescribed for us by God."[70]

In fact there is some doubt about the authenticity of this work attributed to Moshe bar Kepha. He lived at a time when scholarly churchmen devoted much of their effort to salvaging their intellectual and theological heritage by putting together large compilations of previously available texts. Scholars after his time engaged in the same activity. So it is not at all impossible that Moshe bar Kepha himself, or someone after his time, put together this collection of texts on free will, and it has come down to us under Moshe bar Kepha's name by an accident of the processes of text transmission[71]. What is important for present purposes is to take notice of the dispute text contained in it directed against the Muslims, here called *Mhaggrāyê*, a polemical name for Muslims, often found in Syriac texts[72].

Free will as a topic for debate between Christians and Muslims has not come up for discussion thus far in the Syriac dispute texts under review here. Nevertheless, the topic was an important one in *kalām* works, both Christian and Muslim, especially in the eighth and ninth centuries. What is notable about its appearance in the work attributed to Moshe bar Kepha is the evidence it provides for the conclusion that by his day Syriac-speaking churchmen were including the Muslims together with the ancient pagans, the Marcionites, and the Manichaeans, as adversaries of record in the matter of the traditional Christian doctrine of the moral freedom of the human act of will. One supposes, therefore, that by Moshe bar Kepha's day the active

70 British Library Syriac MS 827, add. 14731, f. 11r. See W. Wright, *Catalogue of Syriac Manuscripts*, vol. II, p. 854. See also S. H. Griffith, "Free Will in Christian *Kalām*: Moshe bar Kepha against the Teachings of the Muslims", *Le Muséon* 100 (1987), pp. 143 - 159.

71 On the authenticity of the text, see Griffith, "Free Will: Moshe bar Kepha", p. 148. One must also consider the fact that much of the work attributed to Moshe bar Kepha may come from the earlier book of Anthony of Tagrit on God's providence. See the forthcoming work of Prof. Han J. W. Drijvers on this text.

72 See the discussion in Griffith, "Free Will: Moshe bar Kepha", pp. 151 - 154, with further bibliography.

argument with Muslims about free will was over, and the issue had become a text book topic, rather than a subject of live debate[73].

7. Dionysius bar Ṣalībī (d. 1171)

By far the longest and the fullest text in Syriac to do with disputation with Muslims is the one written by Dionysius bar Ṣalībī, the scholarly monophysite bishop of Amida who was one of the three bright lights in the world of late Syriac letters, the other two being patriarch Michael the Syrian (d. 1199), Dionysius' younger contemporary and Gregory bar Hebraeus (d. 1286), who flourished about a century later. Dionysius' work is magisterial in both tone and scope. And his discussion of the Muslims, as extensive as it is, is included within a much larger review of the intellectual and religious adversaries of the Syrian Orthodox church[74].

The treatise against the Muslims is a true dispute text in the sense that the author's purpose is to acquaint the reader with the truth about Islam and to provide him with arguments deemed fit to reject Islamic challenges to the veracity of Christian doctrines and practices. All of the standard dispute topics are here, in summary form, as if the writer's purpose was the comprehensive one of gathering into one place the best apologetic arguments of the past. In addition, Dionysius has much more to say about the Muslims, their history and their doctrines than any of the earlier dispute texts already reviewed. And the final third of his treatise consists of extensive quotations from the *Qur'ān* in Syriac translation, with Bar Ṣalībī's comments on the side.

In format Bar Ṣalībī's treatise against the Muslims is composed of thirty chapters, distributed consecutively within three general discourses (*mêmrê*). Broadly speaking, the first discourse, in eight chapters, concerns the doctrine of the Trinity. The second discourse, comprising chapters nine to twenty-four, discusses the doctrine of the Incarnation and associated issues, including the Islamic claim that the scriptures foretell the prophecy of Muḥammad. The third discourse, chapters twenty-five to thirty, includes the translations from the *Qur'ān*, to which reference has already been made[75].

In style the treatise follows the question and answer format already familiar from earlier dispute texts. However, Bar Ṣalībī makes no pretense

73 See S. H. Griffith, "Free Will in Christian *Kalām*: the Doctrine of Theodore Abū Qurrah", Parole de l'Orient 14 (1987), pp. 79 - 107.

74 For an overview of the work and its significance, see S. H. Griffith, "Dionysius bar Ṣalībī on the Muslims", in Drijvers, *IV Symposium Syriacum – 1984*, pp. 353 - 365. Only a portion of the text has been published by A. Mingana, "An Ancient Syriac Translation of the Kur'ān Exhibiting New Verses and Variants", *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 9 (1925), pp. 188 - 235. See also G. G. Blum, "Dionysius bar Ṣalībī (gest. 1171)", *Theologische Realenzyklopädie* 9 (1982), pp. 6 - 9.

75 This is the portion of the text published in Mingana, "An Ancient Syriac Translation".

that his text reflects an actual dialogue, even a literary one. Rather, the questions, when they are not simple interrogative sentences, are designated simply as "their objections", followed by "our answers". Clearly the treatise is part of a manual of theology, and more specifically it is a portion of the manual's heresiography[76]. Nevertheless, there is some reference to actual dialogue in it, or to arguments about religion between Christians and Muslims, in that one of the questions in the third chapter asks, "With whom is disputation (*bûḥānâ*) appropriate?" And the very next one asks, "About what might we dispute?"[77] The answers are instructive.

Dionysius bar Ṣalībī says that it is appropriate to debate with Muslim *mutakallimūn*. He puts it this way,

> Our advice is that it is unproductive to converse with those among them who are not knowledgeable, but only with the articulate and the intelligent (*mlîlê wḥakîmê*). It is most productive to excuse oneself from meeting with the 'legitimists', because they are very wily and they think that God the Word is a creature, and the Holy Spirit too, just like Arius.[78]

By invoking Arius' name, Bar Ṣalībī straightaway provides a known place in the Christian scheme of things for most Muslims. For by the 'legitimists' he means the *ahl as-sunnah*, who by his day were in the majority. Suitable dialogue partners would therefore have been presumably only such people as academics, *muʿtazilī mutakallimūn* and philosophers. As for an appropriate topic for a disputation, Bar Ṣalībī gives his answer by immediately launching into a defense of the doctrine of the Trinity on the basis of the Scriptures. And throughout his argument on this topic, as on other topics, he takes every opportunity to cite an apt quotation from the *Qur'ān*.

What makes Dionysius bar Ṣalībī's dispute text distinctive, apart from its length and comprehensiveness, is the amount of information about Muslims it contains, about their history, about the *Qur'ān*, and about the various schools of Islamic thought. This feature of the work makes it unique not only among Syriac dispute texts, but among Christian works on Islam in general from the medieval period.

8. *Gregory bar Hebraeus (d. 1286)*

It would be difficult to overstate the importance of Bar Hebraeus in the history of Syriac literature, or in the history of the Syrian Orthodox Church. He was a polymath scholar who composed important works in both Syriac

76 In earlier portions of the larger work Bar Ṣalībī had presented arguments against the Jews, the Nestorians, the Chalcedonians, and the Armenians. See Griffith, "Dionysius bar Ṣalībī", pp. 354 u. 360.

77 Harvard Syriac MS 53, f. 2v. On this manuscript see M. H. Goshen Gottstein, *Syriac Manuscripts in the Harvard College Library, a Catalogue* (Missoula, Mont., 1979), p. 59.

78 Harvard Syriac MS 53, f. 2v.

and Arabic. He was well known not only among his co-religionists, but he was known and respected among Muslim intellectuals as well[79]. He did not compose a separate work that one could characterize as a disputation with Muslims. But there are several extended passages in works of his on broader themes that do in fact contain such dispute texts. For completeness' sake, and because of Bar Hebraeus' own personal importance, one might give a brief account of two of these dispute passages here.

Bar Hebraeus' *Candelabra of the Sanctuary* is an encyclopaedic work of theology that amounts to a veritable *Summa Theologiae*. He composed it in 1264, the year in which he became the *Maphrian* of Tagrīt, the titular head of the Syrian Orthodox churches in the east. It is in the Christological portion of this work, in the section that deals with the objections of the adversaries to the doctrine of the incarnation, that Bar Hebraeus takes up the objection of the Muslims (*mašlmānê*), who say,

> The Messiah was expected, and the prophets in fact prophesied about him. But he was neither God nor the son of God. Rather, he was only God's prophet and servant.[80]

Following this accurate statement of Islamic beliefs about Christ, Bar Hebraeus goes on to list eight objections that Muslims customarily registered against the doctrine of the incarnation. Then he provides eight Christian rebuttals to the foregoing objections. Of them all, it is the eighth Islamic objection, and the Christian response, that are the most interesting. The Islamic objection concerns the *Qur'ān* and its rejection of Christian doctrines, and it cites the evidentiary miracles that in the Islamic view should testify to the *Qur'ān*'s veracity. The argument includes the Islamic doctrine of the inimitability of the Arabic diction in the *Qur'an*, coming as it does from the mouth of an illiterate man (*dlâ yāda*ᶜ *seprâ*), that not even Arabic scholars could match[81]. The objection then goes on to lay claim to Biblical prophecies about Muḥammad that in the Islamic view should warrant his acceptance as a messenger of God.

In his response, Bar Hebraeus cites Muslims themselves, naming the Shiᶜites as a group, against the reality of any evidentiary miracles outside of the *Qur'ān*, and he refers by name to the teachings of Muslim scholars such as Fahr ad-Dīn ar-Rāzī, al-Ǧaḥīẓ, and al-Ghazālī to support his arguments[82].

79 See Wolfgang Hage, "Gregor Barhebraeus (1225/26 - 1286)", *Theologische Realenzyklopädie* 14 (1985), pp. 158 - 164, for a succinct introduction and bibliography.

80 J. Khoury (ed.), "Le candélabre du sanctuaire de Grégoire Abou'l Faradj dit Barhebraeus; quatrième base: de l'incarnation", *Patrologia Orientalis* 31 (1964), p. 104.

81 *Ibid.*, p. 110.

82 *Ibid.*, pp. 116 - 120.

This is the only Syriac dispute text one knows, in which the writer shows first hand evidence of his familiarity with Islamic texts, other than the *Qur'ān*.

Bar Hebraeus provided an epitome of these same arguments in a brief work, the *Book of Light Rays*, he composed some time later in his life as an abbreviation of the *Candelabra*. In it he adds to what he said earlier about the *Qur'ān* and in the process he gives further evidence of his familiarity with the scholarship of Muslims. For in response to the Islamic claim that Christians have altered their scriptures to suppress any mention of Muḥammad, Bar Hebraeus argues that while there have been no changes of sense in the transmission of the text of the Bible, the same cannot be said for the *Qur'ān*. And he goes on to cite changes or additions to the text of the *Qur'ān* that he found mentioned in the work of Ibn Masᶜūd, the Muslim authority on the collection of the *Qur'ān*, involving the activity of Zayd ibn Thābit, Muḥammad's amanuensis, when the text was first collected in writing[83].

Bar Hebraeus, therefore, comes the closest of all the writers of Syriac dispute texts to something like a real dialogue with Islam. But since the texts are in Syriac it is clear they are for Christian eyes alone. Nevertheless, in his work there is a concern for scholarly objectivity that sets it apart from the earlier dispute texts, where the clear purpose was to help Christians achieve at least a rhetorical advantage in any argument about religion with Muslims.

II. The Significance of Syriac Dispute Texts

Eight writers are not many as the sole witnesses over a six hundred year period for a whole genre of Syriac literature – dispute texts against Muslims. One could extend the list somewhat by including reference to texts in which Muslims are mentioned in passing, or where some of the broader topics common in the dispute texts are discussed without any apparent reference to Muslims[84]. Nevertheless, the list would still be surprisingly short. And this relative paucity of texts calls one's attention to the fact that in the world of mediaeval Islam, Syriac was not the only language in which even the Christians of the traditionally Syriac-speaking churches had to wage a campaign for the religious allegiance of peoples' minds. For Syriac quickly became a minority language in a world in which Arabic was the idiom of almost all public discourse. And Arabic was in fact the language in whose terms even the very topics of the disputes were set. It is significant that of the eight writers whose dispute texts are reviewed here, three of them also have

83 See the pertinent selections from the text published and translated into French in M. F. Nau, "Deux Textes de Bar Hébraeus sur Mahomet et le Qoran", *Journal Asiatique* 211 (1927), pp. 318 - 323.

84 This is the inclusive approach adopted by L. Sākō, "Bibliographie du dialogue", n. 10 above.

Arabic works to their credit: Patriarch Timothy, Nonnus of Nisibis, and Gregory bar Hebraeus.

Many of the Christian *mutakallimūn* whose Arabic works of Christian apologetics have survived also had their own intellectual roots in the Syriac-speaking world. These include not only Jacobites like Ḥabīb ibn Ḥidmah Abū Rā'iṭah, and Nestorians like ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, but even Melkites like Theodore Abū Qurrah[85]. They realized that the real argument about religion in the territories of the caliphate was being conducted in Arabic. And the circumstance that provoked the composition of Christian apologetical works in Arabic was not only the doctrinal challenge of the *Qur'ān*, but the sociological fact of the conversion of Christians to Islam. The fact of conversion was a circumstance that made it desirable for there to be an intellectually convincing presentation of Christian teaching in Arabic, with which to strengthen the waverers. For the waverers were, in the words of one Arabophone apologist of the ninth century, the *munāfiqīn* of the Christian community[86].

Christian apologetic texts in Arabic were accessible to Christians and Muslims alike, not to mention the Arabophone Jews, who developed a *kalām* of their own at roughly the same time as the Christians did[87]. And there is some evidence that Muslim *mutakallimūn* took the trouble to answer the arguments of their Christian opposite numbers. But one function of the texts in Arabic was not so much to encourage interconfessional dialogue, but to draw the lines of disagreement more clearly. The same writer who spoke of the Christian *munāfiqīn*, was also adamantly opposed to Christians who tried to use Islamic religious phrases in a Christian way, or who modified Christian devotional behavior in response to Islamic criticism.

As for the dispute texts in Syriac, they necessarily served only the internal purposes of the Christian communities in the caliphate, being largely unintelligible to anyone else. In all of them it is Christian doctrine that the writers expound with a care for accuracy. Islamic positions are stated only for the purpose of eliciting a clear and convincing Christian reply. The writers do not

85 See the bibliography in Griffith, "The Prophet Muḥammad".

86 See S. H. Griffith, "Greek into Arabic: Life and Letters in the Monasteries of Palestine in the Ninth Century; the Example of the *Summa Theologiae Arabica*", *Byzantion* 56 (1986), pp. 117 - 138. The author of the *Summa* speaks of the Christian *munāfiqīn* in BL Arabic MS 4950, f. 6v. See S. H. Griffith, "The First Christian Summa Theologiae in Arabic: Christian *Kalām* in Ninth Century Palestine", in M. Gervers & R. J. Bikhazi (eds.), *Conversion and Continuity: Indigenous Christian Communities in Islamic Lands, Eighth to Eighteenth Centuries* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1990), pp. 15 - 31.

87 See S. Stroumsa, "Dawūd ibn Marwān al-Muqammiṣ and his ʿIshrūn Maqāla", (Ph. D. Dissertation, The Hebrew University; Jerusalem, 1983); *idem*, "From Muslim Heresy to Jewish Muslim polemics: Ibn al-Rāwandī's Kitāb al-Dāmigh", *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 107 (1987), pp. 767 - 772.

attempt fairly to portray Islam, except as it challenges Christians. Nevertheless, the dominant mood of the dispute texts is a defensive one. There is virtually no attempt to falsify Islamic doctrines. Even in regard to topics such as the prophethood of Muḥammad, or the status of the *Qur'ān* as a book of divine revelation, this is the case. And even Dionysius bar Ṣalībī with his numerous translations of *Qur'ān* passages, seems more bent on helping the Christian reader to understand the challenge of Islam, than he is in rejecting the Islamic scripture. There are no overt polemics here.

The case is otherwise with Greek and Latin tracts on Islam written by Christian churchmen[88]. They are offensive in character, their purpose is polemical, and their writers' intentions are to discredit Islam. They often have a role to play in the wider theatre of military campaigns against the Muslims[89]. The difference becomes clear when one compares the translations of *Qur'ān* passages done by Dionysius bar Ṣalībī into Syriac, and those done by Niketas of Byzantium (c. 850) into Greek[90]. The latter writer intends basically to ridicule the *Qur'ān*, and to highlight those aspects of the work that Greek eyes can perceive only as barbaric. In Latin the first translations of the *Qur'ān* seem to have had basically a missionary purpose, and to help crusaders better understand their enemies[91]. But here one wanders off into another subject.

Suffice it now to say that the Syriac dispute texts against Muslims are apologetic documents. And they are not the only response of Syriac-speaking churchmen to the challenge of Islam. Rather, it seems to the present writer that this global religious challenge that is Islam is behind the appearance of comprehensive biblical commentaries and the summary presentations of philosophy and theology text books in Syriac during this same six hundred year period. But this too is a topic for another day.

88 For the Greeks see T. Adel Khoury, *Les théologiens byzantins et l'Islam, textes et auteurs (viii^e - xiii^e s.)* (Louvain, 1969); *idem*, "Polémique byzantine contre Islam (viii - xiii siècle)", *Proche Orient Chretien* 29 (1979), pp. 242 - 300; 30 (1980), pp. 132 - 174; 32 (1982), pp. 14 - 49; D. J. Sahas, *John of Damascus on Islam, the "Heresy of the Ishmaelites"* (Leiden, 1972); N. M. Vaporis (ed.), *Orthodox Christians and Muslims* (Brookline, Mass., 1986). For the Latins see N. Daniel, *Islam and the West, the Making of an Image* (2nd rev. ed.; Edinburgh, 1962); *idem*, *The Arabs and Medieval Europe* (London, 1975).

89 See B. Z. Kedar, *Crusade and Mission; European Approaches toward the Muslims* (Princeton, 1984).

90 See Khoury, *Polémique byzantine*, pp. 141 ff.

91 See J. Kritzeck, *Peter the Venerable and Islam* (Princeton, 1964).

Muslims and Church Councils; the Apology of Theodore Abū Qurrah

In the intellectually exciting days of the early Abbasid caliphate, when the Muslim *mutakallimūn* were in their heyday, the Christians of the Oriental Patriarchates came to face the most comprehensive religious critique of the basic doctrines of their faith which any Christians had faced since the days of Galen, Porphyry, Celsus, Iamblichus and the emperor Julian. In response to this challenge, Christian controversialists, conversant in Arabic, arose in the several churches of the east, and particularly among the Chalcedonians. For it was under the leadership of persons with connections in the monasteries of the Holy Land, Mar Sabas, Mar Charitōn, and the monastery of the Mother of God at Sinai, the intellectual centers of the Melkite communities, that Arabophone theologians of a considerable acumen and originality first came to the fore[1]. But there were Arabophone apologists in the other Christian denominations as well in early Abbasid times[2], as the mention of the names of the Jacobite, Ḥabîb ibn Ḫidmah Abū Rā'iṭah (d. before 850), and of the Nestorian 'Ammār al-Baṣrī (fl. c. 850) clearly shows[3]. As for the Melkites, the earliest original writer in Arabic whose name we know from this community was Theodore Abū Qurrah (c. 750-c. 825), and it is a work from his pen which will be the focus of the present essay.

[1] See S.H. Griffith, 'Greek into Arabic: Life and Letters in the Monasteries of Palestine in the Ninth Century; the Example of the *Summa Theologiae Arabica*', *Byz* 56 (1986), 117-138; *idem*, 'The Monks of Palestine and the Growth of Christian Literature in Arabic', *The Muslim World* 78 (1988), 1-28. See also Samir Khalil Samir, 'The Earliest Arab Apology for Christianity (c. 750)', to appear in the forthcoming proceedings of the 'Mingana Symposium on Christian Arabic Texts', 26-29 May, 1990, Selly Oak Colleges, Birmingham, England. Samir's text is the 'Treatise on the Triune Nature of God', partially published by Margaret Dunlop Gibson, *An Arabic Version of the Acts of the Apostles and the Seven Catholic Epistles;... with a Treatise on the Triune Nature of God* (Studia Sinaitica 7; London, 1899), 75-107.

[2] See Sidney H. Griffith, 'The Prophet Muḥammad, his Scripture and his Message according to the Christian Apologies in Arabic and Syriac from the First Abbasid Century', in T. Fahd (ed.), *La vie du prophète Mahomet* (Colloque de Strasbourg 1980; Paris, 1983), 99-146.

[3] See G. Graf, *Die Schriften des Jacobiten Ḥabīb ibn Ḫidma Abū Rā'iṭa* (CSCO, vols. 130 and 131; 1951); Michel Hayek, *'Ammār al-Baṣrī, apologie et controverses* (Beyrouth, 1977). See also S.H. Griffith, 'Ḥabīb ibn Ḫidmah Abū Ra'iṭah, a Christian *mutakallim* of the First Abbasid Century', *Oriens Christianus*, 64 (1980), 161-201; *idem*, ''Ammār al-Baṣrī's *Kitāb al-Burhān*: Christian *Kalām* in the First Abbasid Century', *Mus* 96 (1983), 145-181.

Abū Qurrah was a monk of the monastery of Mar Sabas in Judea, and for a while he also served as the bishop of the Melkite community in Ḥarrān in Mesopotamian Syria[4]. But he is remembered most of all for his career as an itinerant controversialist in the Chalcedonian cause during the early Abbasid caliphate, from the time of al-Mahdī (775-785) to midway in the reign of al-Ma'mūn (813-833)[5]. Surviving from his pen in more or less easily available modern editions are theological essays in both Greek and Arabic[6]. Like his intellectual master, and his predecessor as a monk of the monastery of Mar Sabas, St. John of Damascus (d.c. 749), Theodore Abū Qurrah was faced with the formidable apologetic task of expounding Christian doctrine in an intellectual milieu dominated by Islam. Whereas St. John wrote in Greek, with an eye to the intellectuals of Constantinople[7]; Abū Qurrah wrote in

[4] For the biography of Theodore Abū Qurrah see Ignace Dick, 'Un continuateur arabe de saint Jean Damascène, Theodore Abūqurra, évêque melkite de Ḥarrān; la personne et son milieu', *Proche-Orient Chrétien*, 12 (1962), 209-223. 319-332; 13 (1963), 114-129; J. Nasrallah, *Histoire du mouvement littéraire dans l'église melchite du V^e au XX^e siècle* (vol. II, tome 2, 750-X^e s.; Louvain and Paris, 1987), 104-134.

[5] See S.H. Griffith, *The Controversial Theology of Theodore Abū Qurrah (c.A.D.750-c.820); a Methodological, Comparative Study in Christian Arabic Literature* (Ph.D. dissertation, The Catholic University of America, Washington, D.C.; Ann Arbor, Michigan: University Microfilms, 1978).

[6] The published works of Abū Qurrah in Arabic are: I. Arendzen, *Theodori Abu Kurra de Cultu Imaginum Libellus e Codice Arabico nunc Primum Editus Latine Versus Illustratus* (Bonn, 1897); C. Bacha, *Les œuvres arabes de Théodore Aboucara évêque d'Haran* (Tripoli, Syria and Rome, 1904); G. Graf, *Die arabischen Schriften des Theodor Abu Qurra, Bischofs von Ḥarran (ca. 740-820)* (Forschungen zur christlich Literatur- und Dogmengeschichte, Band X, Heft 3/4; Paderborn, 1910); L. Cheikho, 'Mīmar li Tadūrūs Abī Qurrah fī Wuǧūd al-Ḫāliq wa d-Dīn al-Qawīm', *al-Machriq*, 15 (1912), 757-774. 825-842; G. Graf, *Des Theodor Abu Kurra Traktat über den Schöpfer und die wahre Religion* (Beiträge zur Geschichte der Philosophie des Mittelalters [Texte und Untersuchungen 14,1], Münster, 1913); I. Dick, 'Deux écrits inédits de Théodore Abuqurra', *Mus* 72 (1959), 53-67; S.H. Griffith, 'Some Unpublished Arabic Sayings Atributed to Theodore Abū Qurrah', *Mus* 92 (1979), 29-35; I. Dick, *Théodore Abuqurra, Traité de l'existence du Createur et de la vraie religion; introduction et texte critique* (Patrimoine Arabe Chrétien 3; Jounieh and Rome, 1982); *idem*, *Théodore Abuqurra, Traité du culte des icones; introduction et texte critique* (Patrimoine Arabe Chrétien 10; Jounieh and Rome, 1986); George Hanna Khoury, *Theodore Abu Qurrah (c. 750-820): Translation and Critical Analysis of his 'Treatise on the Existence of the Creator and on the True Religion'* (Ph.D. dissertation, Graduate Theological Union, Berkeley, Calif.; Ann Arbor, Michigan: University Microfilms, 1990). For Abū Qurrah's works preserved only in Greek, see PG 97, cols. 1461-1610. For the manuscripts of unpublished works attributed to Abū Qurrah, see Graf, *GCAL*, vol. II, 7-16 and J. Nasrallah, 'Dialogue islamo-chrétien à propos de publications récentes', *Revue des Études Islamiques*, 46 (1978), 129-132. See also Nasrallah, *Histoire du mouvement littéraire*, vol. II, tome 2, 122-125. For additional Greek manuscripts of works by Abū Qurrah see L.G. Westerink, 'Marginalia by Arethas in Moscow Greek MS 231', *Byz* 42 (1972), 196-244, also published in the author's *Texts and Studies in Neoplatonism and Byzantine Literature* (Amsterdam, 1980), 295-343; Nasrallah, *Histoire du mouvement littéraire*, vol. II, tome 2, 125-129.

[7] See J. Nasrallah, *Saint Jean de Damas, son époque, sa vie, son œuvre* (Harissa, 1950); Daniel J. Sahas, *John of Damascus on Islam, the 'Heresy of the Ishmaelites'* (Leiden, 1972).

Arabic, with an eye to the Muslim *mutakallimūn* of Baṣrah, Kufa and Baghdad.

The first generation of Christian thinkers living under Islamic rule, who took notice of the formidable religious challenge of the new creed, had responded to it either in an apocalyptic way, seeing in the advent of Arab hegemony the unfolding of a foretold stage in eschatological destiny[8], or they countered the challenge with the beginnings of a new Christian apologetic response, with Islam as the foil against which the case for Christianity had to be made anew[9]. Both responses appeared for the first time in the Syriac-speaking communities in the days of the caliphs ʿAbd al-Malik (685-707) and his son al-Walīd (705-715), who were the first Muslim rulers to take active steps to promote Islam at the expense of the previously established Christian churches[10]. These first Christian apologies were little more than catechetical style questions and answers, which provided immediate replies for churchmen caught in arguments about religion with Muslims. But they did broadly speaking lay down the topical outlines for the more developed Christian

[8] See A. Abel, 'L'apocalypse de Baḥîra et la notion islamique de Mahdî', *Annuaire de l'Institut de Philologie et d'Histoire Orientales*, 3 (1935), 1-12; F.J. Martinez, *Eastern Christian Apocalyptic in the Early Muslim Period: Pseudo-Methodius and Pseudo-Athanasius* (Ph.D. dissertation, The Catholic University of America, Washington, D.C., 1985); *idem*, 'The Apocalyptic Genre in Syriac: the World of Pseudo-Methodius', in H.J.W. Drijvers *et al.* (eds.), *IV Symposium Syriacum 1984* (OCA 229; 1987), 337-352; H. Suermann, *Die geschichts-theologische Reaktion auf die einfallenden Muslime in der edessenischen Apokalyptik des 7. Jahrhunderts* (Frankfurt am Main, 1985); *idem*, 'Der byzantinischen Endkaiser bei Pseudo-Methodios', *Oriens Christianus*, 71 (1987), 140-155; S.P. Brock, 'North Mesopotamia in the Late Seventh Century; Book XV of John bar Penkāyē's *Rīš Mellē*', *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam*, 9 (1987), 51-75; G.J. Reinink, 'Pseudo-Methodius und die Legende vom römischen Endkaiser', in W. Verbeke *et al.* (eds.), *The Use and Abuse of Eschatology in the Middle Ages* (Leuven, 1988), 82-111; F.J. Martinez, 'The King of Rūm and the King of Ethiopia in Medieval Apocalyptic Texts from Egypt', in W. Godlewski (ed.), *Coptic Studies; Acts of the Third International Congress of Coptic Studies* (Warsaw, 1990), 247-259. See also H.J.W. Drijvers, 'Jews, Christians, and Muslims in Northern Syria in Early Islamic Times: the Gospels of the Twelve Apostles and Related Sources', and G.J. Reinink, 'The Romance of Julian the Apostate as a Source for the 7th Century Syriac Apocalypses', to appear in the published proceedings of *La Syrie, de Byzance à l'Islam*, colloque international 11-15 septembre 1990, Lyon, Maison de l'Orient Méditerranéen.

[9] See F. Nau, 'Un colloque de patriarche Jean avec l'émir des Agaréens', *Journal Asiatique*, 11th series, 5 (1915), 225-279. A German version is available in H. Suermann, 'Orientalische Christen und der Islam; christliche Texte aus der Zeit von 632-750', *Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft und Religionswissenschaft*, 67 (1983), 122-128. See also Kh. Samir, 'Qui est l'interlocuteur musulman du patriarche syrien Jean III (631-648)?' in H.J.W. Drijvers *et al.* (eds.), *IV Symposium Syriacum 1984* (OCA 229; 1987), 387-400. See also Peter Jager, 'Intended Edition of a Disputation between a Monk of the Monastery of Bēt Ḥalē and One of the Ṭayōyê', in Drijvers, *IV Symposium Syriacum*, 401-402; H. Suermann, 'Bibliographie du dialogue islamo-chrétien; une controverse de Johannan de Lîtârb', *Islamochristiania*, 15 (1989), 169-174.

[10] See S.H. Griffith, 'Images, Islam and Christian Icons; a Moment in the Christian/Muslim Encounter in Early Islamic Times', forthcoming in the published proceedings of *La Syrie, de Byzance à l'Islam*, colloque international 11-15 septembre 1990, Lyon, Maison de l'Orient Méditerranéen.

apologies in Syriac and Arabic which began to appear in the next generation[11]. Meanwhile, in the Islamic communities in the same period, there were the beginnings of what would quickly become in the next decades a lively philosophico-theological set of debates[12], which were never far removed from the influence, and sometimes even the participation of Christian thinkers, who were by the time of the early Abbasid caliphs, as we have already said, fully conversant in Arabic.

Theodore Abū Qurrah and his contemporaries were faced with the task not only of countering the direct challenges of Muslims to the central doctrines of Christianity, such as the Trinity and the Incarnation, but they undertook the explanation of these doctrines within the newly Arabophone churches in an idiom in which the religious vocabulary was already determined by the *Qur'ān* and by the burgeoning theology of the Muslims. In these circumstances, one might expect a certain doctrinal development to take place in the transmission of the patristic heritage of the Christians to new generations, whose language would no longer be the Greek or the Syriac of the times of the fathers, but would come to be viewed as its classic age. And one can in fact see in the works of the Arabophone theologians of the eighth and ninth centuries onward new approaches to the reasoned presentation of the principal articles of the faith which owe their inspiration to developments in Islamic religious thought. In this connection one might mention efforts to discuss the persons of the Trinity in terms of the current Islamic theories of the divine attributes[13], or the defense of the freedom of human choice and the responsibility for good or evil actions in the same terms in which the Muslim *mutakallimūn* addressed the problem of free will[14]. In one work Theodore

[11] See Griffith, 'The Prophet Muḥammad, his Scripture and his Message', and *idem*, 'Disputes with Muslims in Syriac Christian Texts: from Patriarch John III (d. 648) to Bar Hebraeus (d. 1286)', forthcoming in the proceedings of the 25th Wolfenbütteler Symposion, 'Religionsgespräche im Mittelalter/Religious Disputations in the Middle Ages', 11 to 15 June, 1989.

[12] See S. Pines, 'A Note on an Early Meaning of the term *Mutakallim*', *Israel Oriental Studies*, 1 (1971), 224-240; J. Van Ess, 'Disputations-praxis in der islamischen Theologie, eine vorlaüfige Skizze', *Revue des Études Islamiques*, 44 (1976), 23-60; M.A. Cook, 'The Origins of Kalām', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, 43 (1980), 32-43; *idem*, *Early Muslim Dogma* (Cambridge, 1981); J. Van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft im 2. und 3. Jahrhundert Hidschra; eine Geschichte des religiösen Denkens im frühen Islam* (vol. 1; Berlin and New York, 1991).

[13] See, e.g., S.H. Griffith, 'The Concept of *al-uqnūm* in ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī's Apology for the Doctrine of the Trinity', in Kh. Samir (ed.), *Actes du premier congrès international d'études arabes chrétiens* (OCA 218; 1982), 169-191. See also Rachid Haddad, *La trinité divine chez les théologiens arabes (750-1050)* (Paris, 1985).

[14] See, e.g., S.H. Griffith, 'Free Will in Christian *Kalām*: the Doctrine of Theodore Abū Qurrah', *Parole de l'Orient*, 14 (1987), 79-107; *idem*, 'Free Will in Christian *Kalām*: Moshe bar Kepha against the Teachings of the Muslims', *Mus* 100 (1987), 143-159; *idem*, 'Free Will in Christian *Kalām*: Chapter XVIII of the Summa Theologiae Arabica', in R. Schulz und M. Görg (eds.), *Lingua Restituta Orientalis; Festgabe für Julius Assfalg* (Ägypten und Altes Testament 20; Wiesbaden, 1990), 129-134.

Abū Qurrah argues in behalf of Christianity as the one true religion in which alone God wants to be worshipped, by basing the structure of his argument largely on the prophetology of the *Qur'ān*[15].

The purpose of the present essay is to examine another work by Abū Qurrah in which the reader can see that the pressure of an Islamic challenge lies behind the apologetic argument which the author puts forward as a reasoned defense of a Christian position. In this instance, however, Abū Qurrah does not borrow from the intellectual wealth of the Muslims. Rather, he reaches back a century or more into the patristic heritage of the Melkite community for ideas to develop into an argument in defense of the teaching authority of church councils, which has as its linchpin a notion of the prerogative of the bishop of Rome which may appear at first sight to be nothing short of revisionist, until one views it from Abū Qurrah's particular apologetic perspective, dominated as it is by the challenge of Islam.

Muslim intellectuals were well aware of the fact that all the Christian communities agreed that they accepted the authority of the Old Testament and the New Testament, but that the several denominations disagreed in their interpretations of the scriptures, and particularly in the wording of the doctrinal formulae that expressed the faith of the distinct confessional communities. What is more, Muslim controversialists knew, as we shall see, that the doctrinal formulae over which the Christians argued among themselves were not to be found *verbatim* in the scriptures, but in the Melkite church at least were authorized by solemn ecclesiastical assemblies which the Christians called councils. So the Muslims were not slow to argue that conciliar teachings were not truly the teachings of Jesus. And the Christians had to respond with a reasoned defense of the role of the councils in the life of the church, even when they were arguing with one another. For in Arabic, Muslim thinkers could and did read over their shoulders.

Abū Qurrah took up the question of the ecumenical councils in an Arabic tract to which one might give the convenient title, 'On the Law, the Gospel, and Orthodoxy', or 'On Orthodoxy' for short. In it he argued that the doctrines of the first six ecumenical councils are the measure of orthodox Christian thought, answering to the claims of the Law, the Prophets, and the Gospel. This apologetic scheme was particularly well suited to the Islamic context, as we shall see, because of the *Qur'ān*'s acknowledgement of these scriptures, at least in theory.

The present study unfolds under three broad headings: the tract on orthodoxy and its arguments; Abū Qurrah's theology of the councils; and

[15] See S.H. Griffith, 'Faith and Reason in Christian *Kalām*: Theodore Abū Qurrah on Discerning the True Religion', to appear in the forthcoming proceedings of the 'Mingana Symposium on Christian Arabic Texts', 26-29 May, 1990, Selly Oak Colleges, Birmingham, England.

Abū Qurrah between Rome and Constantinople, the preoccupations of the church in the Holy Land in early Islamic times.

I

Theodore Abū Qurrah's Tract on Orthodoy

A. *The Text*

With the exception of a pamphlet on the veneration of the holy icons, which John Arendzen of the archdiocese of Westminster published in 1897[16], the Arabic works of Theodore Abū Qurrah first became available to modern readers in 1904, when Constantine Bacha, a priest of the monastery of the Holy Savior in Lebanon, published a selection of nine of them, drawn from an old manuscript he found in the monastery library. It was copied as recently as the year 1735. But it carries the copyist's testimony that he in turn worked from a text written in the year 1051 by a monk named Agapius, who testified that his exemplar was a yet more ancient manuscript written at Mar Sabas monastery in Judea[17]. Given the present state of our knowledge of scribal activity at Mar Sabas and Mar Charitōn in the second half of the ninth century[18], one might therefore be fairly confident that the text of Abū Qurrah's Arabic treatises does indeed have a pedigree reaching back as far as the ninth century at Mar Sabas, the very monastic community of which he was once a member.

Of the nine Arabic works by Abū Qurrah which he edited in 1904, Constantine Bacha had recognized straightaway that one of them, 'On Orthodoxy', was of uncommon interest. In 1903 he published it serially in an Arab Christian periodical[19], and in 1905 he re-published the Arabic text of this essay separately, together with a French translation[20]. By 1910 a German translation by Georg Graf had appeared[21], and in the same year

[16] Arendzen, *Theodori Abu Kurra de Cultu Imaginum Libellus*. See also S.H. Griffith, 'Theodore Abū Qurrah's Arabic Tract on the Christian Practice of Venerating Images', *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 105 (1985), 53-73.

[17] Bacha, *Les œuvres arabes*, 5-6. Now the text is known to survive in at least three manuscripts. See Nasrallah, *Histoire du mouvement littéraire*, 120.

[18] See Sidney H. Griffith, 'Stephen of Ramlah and the Christian Kerygma in Arabic in Ninth-Century Palestine', *JEH* 36 (1985), 23-45; 'Anthony David of Baghdad, Scribe and Monk of Mar Sabas; Arabic in the Monasteries of Palestine', 58 (1989), 7-19.

[19] C. Bacha, 'Treatise on the Truth of the Christian Religion [Arabic]', *al-Machriq*, 6 (1903), 633-643. 693-702. 800-809.

[20] C. Bacha, *Un traité des œuvres arabes de Théodore Abou-Kurra* (Tripoli de Syrie and Rome, 1905). The Arabic text of 'On Orthodoxy' also appears in L. Cheikho (ed.), *Seize traités théologiques d'auteurs arabes chrétiens* (Beirut, 1906), 56-87; *idem*, *Vingt traités théologiques d'auteurs arabes chrétiens* (Beirut, 1920), 75-107.

[21] Georg Graf, *Die arabischen Schriften des Theodor Abu Qurra* (Paderborn, 1910), 88-128.

C.A. Kneller, S.J. published the first scholarly study of the essay's very interesting conciliar theology, calling attention to the special role it assigns to the bishop of Rome in confirming the faith of his brother bishops in council[22]. No new discussion of Abū Qurrah's essay 'On Orthodoxy' appeared until the 1970's, when Hermann Josef Sieben analyzed it in the course of his magisterial investigation of the principal sources of the idea of a council in the ancient church[23]. And Sieben's analysis has until now remained the only recent scholarly study of the work. Both Kneller and Sieben, as will appear below, seem to have missed some of the tract's more telling points, since they ignored the background of the claims of Muslim scholars that would have been ever present to Abū Qurrah's mind, and that in fact helped form his thought.

From a strictly European point of view, it may well be true, as Sieben wrote, that Theodore Abū Qurrah 'did not belong to the main stream of ecclesiastical development'[24]. But Sieben makes this observation strictly from the perspective of the history of the development of the conciliar theology of the patriarchate of Rome. From a broader historical perspective, one should not discount the independent value of Abū Qurrah's theology of the councils of orthodoxy, formulated as it was in the aftermath of the Monothelite controversy, within the Jerusalem patriarchate and under the watchful eyes of Muslim polemicists. Nevertheless, there is a point of view from which Sieben's observation may be considered to contribute an appropriate caution. For it is quite clear that with the publication of the French translation of the essay 'On Orthodoxy', Constantine Bacha himself had a polemical purpose in mind. He wrote,

> We are publishing this treatise with a French translation to give an exact idea of it, and to establish the Christian tradition in the Orient in the ninth century on the primacy of St. Peter. We will also show that the Melkites of this era in no way participated in the schismatical ideas of Photius of Constantinople[25].

It is evident from this brief quotation alone that Bacha was intent on assimilating Abū Qurrah's ideas of Petrine primacy directly to those in vogue in Rome when the spirit of Vatican I was still fresh. The same may be said of Kneller's use of such terms as 'pope' and 'papacy' in his brief discussion of Abū Qurrah's tract. These terms, which appear nowhere in the essay 'On Orthodoxy', evoke a sense of the Petrine ministry that could scarcely have

[22] C.A. Kneller, 'Theodor Abucara über Papstum und Konzilien', *ZKTh* 34 (1910), 419-427.

[23] Hermann Josef Sieben, *Die Konzilsidee der alten Kirche* (Konziliengeschichte, ed. W. Brandmüller; Paderborn, 1979), 171-191. The analysis of Abū Qurrah's essay first appeared as an article, 'Zur Entwicklung der Konzilsidee, achter Teil; Theodore Abu Qurra (+ 820/825) über "unfehlbare" Konzilien', *Theologie und Philosophie*, 49 (1974), 489-509.

[24] Sieben, *Konzilsidee*, 171.

[25] Bacha, *Un traité des œuvres arabes*, 11.

occured to the author. Moreover, in Bacha's instance, there was the added dimension of an apologetic interest in the claims of the Uniate Melkite, or Greek Catholic community to contribute a certain bias to his remarks[26].

Neither Greek Catholic, nor Roman Catholic, nor later Byzantine theological ideas should be read back into Abū Qurrah's words. Rather, as we shall see below, the theological construction which he puts upon the history of the councils of orthodoxy fits squarely within the framework of his apology for the Chalcedonian faith, against the objections of Jacobites and Nestorians, within the world of Islam.

The ever-present background to Theodore Abū Qurrah's ecclesiology is the Islamic milieu within which he elaborated his views. The very structure of the essay 'On Orthodoxy', as we shall see, is dictated by the kerygmatic posture of Islam. The essay is in every line a response to the call to Islam as well as an answer to Christian adversaries; it provides an Arabophone Christian's apology for his beliefs, in the face of what one Muslim controversialist of the ninth century called the 'silencing questions' to be put to Christians[27]. These questions were designed to put Christians into a dilemma of contradiction. The questions confronted scriptural affirmations about Jesus and about God on the one side, with affirmations of the creed of Nicea on the other side. The intention was to show the church's doctrines contradicting the Bible. Clearly, for his own sense of composure in the face of such Islamic polemic, the Christian was required to come up with a defense of the role of councils in the church. The essay 'On Orthodoxy' was Abū Qurrah's answer to such pressing questions. Moreover, in addition to the Muslims, there were in Abū Qurrah's work, the Christian adversaries too, particularly the Nestorians and the Jacobites. These were the denominations within the Syriac and Arabic-speaking communities who, along with the Monothelites, refused to acknowledge the councils of Orthodoxy. In the world of Islam, the confrontation of these denominations with one another took on a special poignancy, as they struggled with one another for the favor of the Muslims, both in the civil arena, and in the effort to commend their own beliefs to the Muslims as the true Christianity. Gone from all their minds were concerns for the churches outside of the caliphate.

[26] For an account of the historical circumstances see Robert M. Haddad, *Syrian Christians in Muslim Society; an Interpretation* (Princeton, 1970).

[27] This was the parlance of one 'Alī ibn Rabbān aṭ-Ṭabarī, a former Nestorian Christian, who converted to Islam after his seventieth birthday, somewhere between A.D. 838 and 848. He occupied his old age in writing pamphlets designed to disturb the consciences of his former confreres, as he said himself, and to attract them to the profession of Islam. See A. Khalifé and W. Kutsch, 'Ar-radd 'alā n-Naṣārā de 'Alī aṭ-Ṭabari', *Mélanges de l'Université Saint Joseph*, 36 (1959), 115-148.

B. *The Topics*

The full title of Abū Qurrah's essay 'On Orthodoxy', as it appears in the manuscript from which it was edited is as follows:

A treatise on the confirmation of the holy law of Moses, and of the prophets who prophesied about the Messiah, and of the undefiled Gospel which the disciples of the Messiah, born of the virgin Mary, transmitted to the nations; and the confirmation of the orthodoxy which people ascribe to the Chalcedonians, and the nullification of every denomination (*millah*) which Christians embrace except this denomination[28].

While this descriptive title for the tract probably does not come from the pen of Abū Qurrah, it is a fair indication of its contents. One immediately observes that there are two principal parts to the work. The first part justifies the Christian Bible: the Law, the Prophets, the Gospel; the second part justifies Chalcedonian orthodoxy, as presented in the teachings of the first six ecumenical councils. Both of these topics were issues in the apologetics of orthodox Christians, as they strove to respond to the challenges which Muslims customarily posed for them. Since it will be the concern of the next section of the present study to review Abū Qurrah's conciliar theology, here one may be content briefly to summarize the main arguments of the two sections of the essay 'On Orthodoxy'.

1. *The Christian Bible*

A major Muslim objection to Christian faith was the contention that the Scriptures which the Christians cited in support of their doctrines were not the original Torah or Gospel that God communicated to Moses and Jesus respectively. Rather, the Muslim polemicists contended that both the Torah and the Gospel as they were in the hands of the Christians were distorted, both in text and in interpretation[29]. As for the epistles of St. Paul, Muslims charged that they simply had no standing as scripture at all. Rather, Paul was himself, in the Islamic view, one of the people most responsible for the distortion of Jesus' message[30]. Furthermore, it was an Islamic contention that Moses, Jesus, Muḥammad, and the other prophets, while they were not in every way on an equal footing, they were nevertheless equally human creatures of God, who were but messengers sent by God to their respective

[28] Bacha, *Un traité des œuvres arabes*, 7.

[29] On this subject see I. Goldziher, 'Über muhammedanische Polemik gegen Ahl al-Kitāb', *Zeitschrift der deutschen morgenländische Gesellschaft*, 32 (1878), 341-387; I. Di Matteo, 'Il taḥrīf od alterazione della secondo i Musulmani', *Bessarione*, 38 (1922), 64-111. 223-260; W. Montgomery Watt, 'The Early Development of the Muslim Attitude to the Bible', *Glasgow University Oriental Society Transactions*, 16 (1955-1956), 50-62; J.-M. Gaudeul et R. Caspar, 'Textes de la tradition musulmane concernant le *taḥrīf* (falsification) des écritures', *Islamochristiana*, 6 (1980), 61-104.

[30] See the remarks of 'Alī ibn Rabbān aṭ-Ṭabari in Khalifé and Kutsch, 'Ar-Radd 'alā-n-Naṣārā', 115-148.

communities, with a scripture in hand, to call people to repentance, faith, and submission to God. Muḥammad, as the *Qur'ān* put it, is 'the seal of the prophets' (*al-Aḥzab*, XXXIII:40)[31]. While Jesus, in the *Qur'ān* and in the view of the Muslims, is 'the Messiah, the son of Mary, the messenger of God, His word that God put into Mary, and a spirit from Him' (*an-Nisā*, IV:171). As such, the *Qur'ān* also says, 'Jesus is like Adam with God, His creation is from dust' (*Āl 'Imrān*, III:59). Consequently, the *Qur'ān* exhorts Muslims:

Say, we believe in God and in what has been brought down to us, and what has been brought down to Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, and the tribes, and in what Moses, Jesus, and the prophets were brought from their Lord, and we make no distinction between any of them (*Āl 'Imrān*, III:84)[32].

Here is not the place to explore in detail the Islamic view of the Gospel, or the standing of Jesus in what one might call the Christology of the *Qur'ān*. It is sufficiently clear in the quotations from the *Qur'ān* given above that a Christian apologist in Abū Qurrah's day had to defend a different view of the Torah, the Prophets and the Gospel than the one held by Muslims, and that contrary to the *Qur'ān*, the Christian apologist had to commend a belief in Jesus as a unique messenger of God, indeed the son of God, and God himself. This was the burden of the first part of Abū Qurrah's essay 'On Orthodoxy'. Elsewhere he had set the tone for his argument with the following statement, in which one may clearly see that in his view the Bible is the unquestioned basis of Christian faith. He wrote:

Christianity is simply faith in the Gospel and its appendices, and in the law of Moses and the books of the prophets in between. Every intelligent person must believe in what these books we have mentioned say, and acknowledge its truth and act on it, whether his own understanding attains it or not[33].

In this statement one may quickly recognize Abū Qurrah's claim for the integrity of the Christian Bible. It consists of the Gospel according to the four evangelists, followed by the other New Testament books, Acts to Revelations, along with the Torah, and all the books from Joshua to Malachi, which come in between the Torah and the Gospel in the Septuagint. In the Islamic context, this canonical insistence was of fundamental importance. But equally important for the purposes of the essay 'On Orthodoxy' is the quotation's

[31] On the estimation of Muḥammad in the Islamic community, see now A. Schimmel, *And Muhammad is His Messenger* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1985). On the phrase 'seal of the prophets', generally taken to mean the last of the prophets, see now the interesting study by G.G. Stroumsa, '"Seal of the Prophets", the Nature of a Manichaean Metaphor', *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam*, 7 (1986), 61-74.

[32] On the estimation of Jesus in the Islamic community, see most recently R. Arnaldez, *Jésus, fils de Marie, prophète de l'Islam* (Paris, 1980); K. Cragg, *Jesus and the Muslim, an Exploration* (London, 1985).

[33] Bacha, *Les œuvres arabes*, 27.

final insistence that the Christian must acknowledge what the Bible affirms, 'whether his own understanding attains it or not'. For, a principal apologetic concern in Abū Qurrah's Arabic works was to argue that 'Orthodox' for Chalcedonian Christianity alone among the several denominations opened a path for all people of good will to follow with confidence, the intellectually dull, the mediocre, and the worldly wise altogether[34].

As for the Christian Bible, and its proclamation of Jesus as the Messiah, the son of God, and God himself, Abū Qurrah argues in the first part of the essay 'On Orthodoxy' that such a claim is irrefutably affirmed by the testimony of the Gospel, supported not only by Jesus' confirmation of the prophecies of the Old Testament, but by the evidentiary miracles performed by Jesus in his own name, and by the apostles after him in Jesus' name. The fact that 5/6 of the people of the world, to quote Abū Qurrah's estimate[35], accepted the preaching of the apostles as confirmed by the miracles they worked in Jesus' name, for him constitutes proof of the historicity of the miracles themselves. Consequently, for Abū Qurrah, Jesus Christ as proclaimed in the Gospel is the only credible focus for human faith. He wrote:

> The Gentiles only accepted Christ because of the miracles mentioned in the Gospel and the books of the disciples. This compels your mind to believe in and to acknowledge these miracles, as if you had seen them and witnessed them yourself. These miracles are sufficient to show that Christ is God and the son of God as he said of himself. Christ and the disciples bear witness to Moses and all of the prophets, that they are prophets, and they confirm them. By reason of the witness of Christ and his disciples, Moses and the prophets are confirmed today, in the judgment of any intelligent person, as emissaries sent by God (*mursalīn min Allāh*)[36].

Here in a nutshell is the argument of the first part of the essay 'On Orthodoxy'. The 'Gospel and the books of the disciples' are the New Testament. The record of the miracles recorded here justifies faith in Jesus Christ. The acceptance of faith in Jesus Christ by so many unlikely people in the world, in turn confirms the veracity of the NT record. And, finally, it is the NT that confirms Moses and the prophets of the OT, and not *vice versa*. This is the apologetic stance that Abū Qurrah supported, in the face of the challenge of the call to Islam[37].

[34] See, e.g., Bacha, *Un traité des œuvres arabes*, 17, and *passim* in the Arabic works. In Greek, Abū Qurrah spoke of furnishing arguments suitable to the requirements of *mōroi*, *mesoi*, and *sophoi* altogether. See his Greek *opusculum* XXI, PG 97, cols. 1548-1552.

[35] Bacha, *Un traité des œuvres arabes*, 14.

[36] *Ibid.* Noteworthy is the last phrase in the quotation: *mursalīn min Allāh*. This term for 'emissaries (*mursalīn*)' occurs some 24 times in the *Qur'ān* in the sense the word has here. There can be no doubt that Abū Qurrah's argument has the *Qur'ān*'s 'prophetology' in the background.

[37] In addition to this appeal to miracles as the best proof of the veracity of Christianity, an argument that Abū Qurrah shared with other Christian apologists, our author in another tract also composed an ingenious apologetic argument from reason, the analysis of which cannot detain us here. See S.H. Griffith, 'Comparative Religion in the Apologetics of the First Christian Arabic Theologians', *Proceedings of the PMR Conference*, 4 (1979), 63-87; *idem*, 'Faith and Reason in Christian *Kalām*', see n. 15 above.

2. Chalcedonian Orthodoxy

Even the Muslims noticed that while the members of the Christian community agreed that Jesus Christ was the son of God, and that this was the unequivocal teaching of what the Muslims regarded as the 'distorted' Christian Bible, Christians themselves were nevertheless divided into opposing sects over how the confession of Jesus' divinity might be stated in non-Biblical terms[38]. For Theodore Abū Qurrah it was a question of how to state the meaning of commonly accepted Biblical texts. He argued that since the words of the Bible were the Holy Spirit's words, so were their true meanings what the Holy Spirit meant to communicate to the church. The task of discerning the true meaning of the Holy Spirit's words in the scriptures, according to Abū Qurrah, belonged to the church alone, gathered in council, on the model inspired in the Scriptures by the Holy Spirit himself. It is the burden of the essay 'On Orthodoxy' to defend this position against the objections from the Muslims on the one hand, and on the other hand against positions adopted by rival Christian groups whom Abū Qurrah calls:

> Nestorians, Jacobites, Julianists, Maronites, and other heresies that claim Christianity for themselves. For each one of those whom we have mentioned thinks that our endeavor to give Christianity a firm basis belongs to him alone, since he maintains that he is the true Christian[39].

Since the review of Abū Qurrah's conciliar theory will occupy the next section of this study, suffice it to say here that he contends that the six councils of orthodoxy all correspond to the pattern set out in the scriptures

[38] See, e.g., the account of the Jacobites, Nestorians, and Melkites left by the Mu'tazilite al-Warrāq (d. A.D. 861), in A. Abel, *Abū 'Īsā Muḥammad b. Harūn al-Warrāq; le livre pour la réfutation des trois sectes chrétiennes, texte arabe traduit et présenté* (Mimeo ed.; Bruxelles, 1949); or an-Nāshi' al-Akbar's (d. A.D. 905) account of the Christians in his *al-Kitāb al-Aswat*, in J. Van Ess, *Frühe mu'tazilitische Häresiographie; zwei Werke des Nāsi' al-Akbar* (Beirut, 1971), 76-87 (Arabic). 65-91 (German).

[39] Bacha, *Un traité des œuvres arabes*, 16-17. The inclusion of the name of the Maronites here reflects what C. Bacha found in the manuscript he copied. In his edition of the text he replaced 'Maronites' with 'Monothelites', always in parentheses, because, as he says, 'nous n'avons pas voulu blesser les sentiments de nos frères qui aiment faire catholiques leurs ancêtres des siècles passés'. *Ibid.* 12. Abū Qurrah also named the Maronites as adversaries in Christology in the creed he composed in Arabic. See Dick, 'Deux écrits inédits', 58. On the Maronites, Monothelitism and Orthodoxy, see now S.P. Brock, 'A Syriac Fragment on the Sixth Council', *Oriens Christianus*, 57 (1973), 63-71; 'An Early Syriac Life of Maximus the Confessor', *AnBoll* 91 (1973), 299-346; 'A Monothelete Florilegium in Syriac', in C. Laga, J.A. Munitiz, L. Van Rompay (eds.), *After Chalcedon; Studies in Theology and Church History* (Leuven, 1985), 35-45; 'Two Sets of Monothelete Questions to the Maximianists', *Orientalia Lovaniensia Periodica*, 17 (1986), 119-140; Jean Gribomont, 'Documents sur les origines de l'église maronite', *Parole de l'Orient*, 5 (1974), 95-132.

(Acts 15.1-21) for resolving the major doctrinal questions that may arise in church life, and that consequently the voice of these councils must be considered to be the voice of the Holy Spirit.

Before turning to a review of Abū Qurrah's conciliar theology, however, one should briefly take further notice of the two sets of circumstances, within which he discussed the topics he addressed, and which formed the background against which he elaborated his distinctive views. They are: Muslim objections to any religious adherence to the teachings of the church councils on the part of Christians; and Abū Qurrah's own theological milieu, prior in time, and a world away from the environment in which the *Synodicon of Orthodoxy* later appeared in the year 843.

a. Muslims and Church Councils

The classic statement of the Islamic polemic against church councils as agents for the corruption and distortion of what Jesus taught and preached is available in the work of the great systematizer of Muʿtazilite thought, the *qāḍi* ʿAbd al-Ǧabbār al-Hamdhānī (d. 1025). Although ʿAbd al-Ǧabbār lived two hundred years after the time of Theodore Abū Qurrah, since his purpose was to purvey the traditional teaching of his own school of thought in Islam, one may be confident that, as in other issues, so in this one he faithfully reflects the thinking of his forbears as far back as the first Abbasid century. As for the polemic against the Christians, one finds it both in the author's voluminous summary of Muʿtazilite thought, *al-Mughnī*[40], and in his extended justification of Muḥammad's claims to prophecy, a book called, *Tathbīt dalā'il an-nubūwah*[41]. It is in his latter work in particular that ʿAbd al-Ǧabbār designates the church councils as the agents responsible for what he regarded as the distortion of Jesus' teaching, as Christians customarily presented it.

According to ʿAbd al-Ǧabbār, the church councils played a major role in Romanizing the religion of Jesus. He maintained that this process began already with the council of the apostles described in the Acts of the Apostles (chap. XV), where Jesus' followers abandoned the way (*as-sunnah*) of the Torah that Jesus had followed, and introduced the ways of the Gentiles[42]. Further, ʿAbd al-Ǧabbār claimed that it was only at the council of Nicea, with the 318 fathers called together by Constantine, that Christians taught the divinity of Christ, 300 years after his time on earth[43]. Thereafter, according

[40] See Guy Monnot, 'Les doctrines des chrétiens dans le "Moghni" de ʿAbd al-Jabbar', *Mélanges de l'Institut Dominicain d'Études Orientales*, 16 (1983), 9-30.

[41] ʿAbd al-Ǧabbār ibn Aḥmad, *Tathbīt dalā'il an-nubūwah* (ed. ʿAbd al-Karīm ʿUthmān, 2 vols.; Beirut, 1966-1969). For English translations and a discussion of those sections of this work pertinent to the present topic see S.M. Stern, 'Quotations from Apocryphal Gospels in ʿAbd al-Jabbār', *JThSt* 18 (1967), 34-57; "Abd al-Jabbār's Account of How Christ's Religion was Falsified by the Adoption of Roman Customs', *JThSt* 19 (1968), 128-185.

[42] ʿAbd al-Ǧabbār, *Tathbīt*, vol. 1, p. 150.

[43] *Ibid.*, 93. 94. 163.

to ʿAbd al-Ǧabbār, Constantine's sons not only enforced the Nicene teaching, but whenever one of them wanted to establish a new usage, he simply summoned a council[44].

Here one obtains a fair statement of the Islamic charge that the church councils were responsible for the distortion of what Jesus preached. One should notice the elements in the account that also appear in Abū Qurrah's defense of the council as an ecclesiastical institution by which the Holy Spirit speaks to the church. ʿAbd al-Ǧabbār designates the council of the apostles in Jerusalem as a first step in the perversion of Jesus' religion; Abū Qurrah presents this council as an institution prefigured in the assembly of the elders of Israel (Deut. 1.9-18), and he argues that the council of Jerusalem was in turn the scriptural model for resolving doctrinal difficulties in the postapostolic church. ʿAbd al-Ǧabbār saw the council of Nicea as a decisive step in the propagation of what he and all Muslims saw as the fundamental Christian error, namely the doctrine of the divinity of Jesus; Abū Qurrah saw this conciliar teaching as the basic statement of the manifest meaning of the Bible's words about Jesus, that would be vigorously defended in the subsequent councils. ʿAbd al-Ǧabbār scored the role of the Byzantine emperor in church councils; Abū Qurrah was at pains to claim, as we shall see, that the councils were convened at the behest of the bishop of Rome, aided but not controlled by the Christian emperor.

Other Melkite writers in ninth century Syria/Palestine were similarly concerned to laud the efforts of the emperors in regard to the councils, while making the point that these assemblies of bishops were really doing the work of the Holy Spirit. So Abū Qurrah was not alone among the Christian Arab writers in the attempt to deflect the Islamic charge that the councils were in essence instances of interference on the part of the Roman emperors in the affairs of the church, to the effect that Jesus' own teaching and preaching were hoplessly distorted. For example, the now anonymous writer of a long orthodox *summa theologiae arabica* from the mid ninth century had the following to say on this theme:

> God came to the aid of the believers, and helped them by means of the good king Constantine, and the three hundred and eighteen bishops who, in conformity with the Holy Spirit, were gathered together in the city of Nicaea. ... Then one hundred and fifty bishops were gathered together in conformity with the Spirit in Constantinople in the time of king Theodosius[45].

[44] *Ibid.*, 164.

[45] British Library Or. MS 4950, f. 4r. For an introduction to this important, but still unpublished work of Orthodox theology, see Kh. Samir, 'Date de composition de la "somme des aspects de la foi" *OCP* 51 (1985), 352-387; 'La "somme des aspects de la foi", œuvre d'Abū Qurrah?' in Kh. Samir (ed.), *Actes du deuxième congrès international d'études arabes chrétiennes* (OCA 226; 1986), 93-121. See also Sidney H. Griffith, 'A Ninth Century *Summa Theologiae Arabica*', *ibid.*, 123-141; *idem*, 'The First Christian *Summa Theologiae* in Arabic: Christian *Kalām* in Ninth-Century Palestine', in M. Gervers and R.J. Bikhazi (eds.), *Conversion and Continuity:*

b. *The Christian Milieu*

Theodore Abū Qurrah lived and wrote before the appearance of the *Synodicon of Orthodoxy* in 843, and before the accompanying enhancement of the significance of the feast of Orthodoxy at the hands of patriarch Methodios (843-847) in the same year[46]. Moreover, even though Abū Qurrah lived well after the time of the seventh council, Nicaea II in 787, and he composed a long work in Arabic in defense of the veneration of the holy icons, he apparently had no knowledge of the seventh council[47]. At this time the church in the Oriental Patriarchates was effectively cut off from communication with Constantinople[48]. And this fact is an important circumstance for the reader of Abū Qurrah's essay 'On Orthodoxy' to keep in mind. The milieu in which Abū Qurrah wrote was not the ninth century milieu of Constantinopolitan concern with the *Synodicon of Orthodoxy*. Rather, one must read Abū Qurrah's essay from the perspective of the concerns of the patriarchate of Jerusalem, as they developed from the time of the sixth council, the third council of Constantinople (680-681). A century and more after the council, writers such as Abū Qurrah were still very anxious to pledge allegiance to Constantinople III. The reception of this council was still an issue dividing the Chalcedonians in the Oriental Patriarchates.

Two factors in particular are important to remember in this connection. In the first place, the monks in the Holy Land had been alarmed at the imperial and patriarchal support of Monothelitism and Monenergism, a phenomenon that fostered on their part a turn to Rome for the support of Orthodoxy[49].

Indigenous Christian Communities in Islamic Lands, Eighth to Eighteenth Centuries (Toronto, 1990), 15-31; *idem*, 'Islam and the Summa Theologiae Arabica; Rabī' I, 264 A.H.', *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam*, 13 (1990), 225-264.

[46] On these matters see J.M. Hussey, *The Orthodox Church in the Byzantine Empire* (Oxford History of the Christian Church; Oxford, 1986), 62-65. The basic study remains that of J. Gouillard, *Le synodicon de l'Orthodoxie; édition et commentaire* (Travaux et Mémoires 2; Paris, 1967). See also J. Duffy and J. Parker, *The Synodicon Vetus* (Washington, 1979).

[47] See Sidney H. Griffith, 'Theodore Abū Qurrah's Arabic Tract on the Christian Practice of Venerating Images', *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 105 (1985), 53-73.

[48] On this important point, in addition to articles cited in n. 1 above, see also Sidney H. Griffith, 'Eutychius of Alexandrai on the Emperor Theophilus and Iconoclasm in Byzantium: a Tenth Century Moment in Christian Apologetics in Arabic', *Byz* 52 (1982), 154-190; 'Stephen of Ramlah and the Christian Kerygma in Arabic in Ninth-Century Palestine', *JEH* 36 (1985), 23-45. For a broader view see Hugh Kennedy, 'The Melkite Church from the Islamic Conquest to the Crusades: Continuity and Adaptation in the Byzantine Legacy', in *The 17th Byzantine Congress: Major Papers* (New Rochelle, N.Y., 1986), 325-343.

[49] Historically the Holy Land monks were suspicious of the imperial policies, and they often dissented from them. See F. Thomas Noonan, *Political Thought in Greek Palestinian Hagiography (ca. 526-ca. 630)* (Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, the University of Chicago; Chicago, 1975). On the issue of imperial Monothelitism and the Palestinians, see M. Richard, 'Anastase le Sinaïte, l'Hodegos et le monothélisme', *REB* 15 (1957), 29-42; John Moorhead, 'The Monophysite Response to the Arab Invasions', *Byz* 51 (1981), 579-591.

Secondly, the developing conciliar theology in the Melkite community in the Oriental Patriarchates had as a catalyst the growing schism in the originally Syriac-speaking Chalcedonian community, a portion of whom had accepted the emperor Heraclius' ecclesiastical policy[50]. When after the inception of the Abbasid caliphate in the year 750, all meaningful contact with Byzantium was interrupted for almost two centuries, the issues that absorbed the attention of Orthodox thinkers in the Oriental Patriarchates were still centered on Christology and the reception of the six councils, and not the fall-out from iconoclasm in Byzantium[51]. After all, in the territory of Islam, the teachings of the Bible and of the councils of the church about the person of Jesus were still the major topics of public controversy. At no point before the late eleventh century does one find in the works of Orthodox Melkites any concern with the tensions between the sees of Rome and Constantinople that were the topics of so much discussion in the Latin and Greek-speaking worlds already in the ninth century[52].

Against this background, one may appropriately proceed to a quick review of Abū Qurrah's conciliar theology.

II

Theodore Abū Qurrah's Theology of Councils

In the essay 'On Orthodoxy', Abū Qurrah's first step in developing a conciliar theology is to cite what he claims is the Old Testament type for the church councils. He points out first of all that Moses in his own lifetime delivered the divine laws to the Israelites and provided that they were to be administered on a day-to-day basis by a group of appointed officials and judges. He reserved to himself only such cases as would be too difficult for the

[50] See especially the articles by S.P. Brock cited in n. 39 above, and subsequent remarks in the present study.

[51] In the eleventh century, Melkites were still celebrating six ecumenical councils according to the testimony of the Muslim observer, al-Bīrūnī (d. 1050). See R. Griveau, 'Les fêtes des melchites par Abou Rîhân al-Birouni', *PO* 10 (1915), 304-305. Furthermore, among the Melkite collections of canons in Arabic from the 13th to the 17th centuries only seven of the twenty-one MSS mention the seventh council. See J.B. Darhlade, *La collection canonique arabe des Melkites (XIIIe-XVIIe siècles)* (Harissa, 1946), 154-155. Nevertheless, it is clear that in the twelfth century Melkites in the Holy Land knew of the seventh council. It is mentioned in the Arabic text of an Orthodox creed in Sinai Arabic MS 453, f. 12v, a text of the twelfth century in its present condition, the contents of which Rachid Haddad, somewhat improbably in my opinion, dates to the ninth century. See Haddad, *La Trinité divine*, 62-63.

[52] See V. Grumel, 'Jérusalem entre Rome et Byzance: une lettre inconnue du patriarche de Constantinople Nicolas III à son collegue de Jérusalem (vers 1089)', *EO* 38 (1939), 104-117; J. Nasrallah, *Histoire du mouvement littéraire dans l'église melchite du Ve au XXe siècle*, vol. III, t. 1 (969-1250) (Louvain, 1983), 235-239.

appointees (Deut. 1.9-18). When the time of his death approached, however, Moses, realizing that doubts and dissensions would plague the Israelites after his death, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit provided for the institution of Levitical priests and judges who would carry on the role of determining doubtful or difficult cases in his place. The people were then bound to the decisions of these officials, on pain of death (Deut. 17.8-13). Abū Qurrah explains this institution in the following way:

Note that Moses did not assign the investigation of the statutes about which there was some difference, or the decision about them, to any one individual from among the common people, neither those who had some claim to learning, nor those who did not. Rather, the Holy Spirit counselled him and he then entrusted this to the council of the priests, and to the judge who was to be in the place where God would choose that his name be invoked. To no one other than these did he assign, alongside them, any investigation whatsoever[53].

Abū Qurrah finds the New Testament antitype for this Old Testament institution in the narrative of Acts 15. Paul and Barnabas have had a disagreement with two men from Judea about the applicability of the law of Moses to gentile Christians. The matter is not decided by the parties in the dispute. Rather, they refer the question to the gathering of the apostles in Jerusalem, with Peter at their head. Here the decision is made under the direction of the Holy Spirit. For Abū Qurrah, the lesson is obvious.

Note that... when the two parties quarrelled in Antioch about that over which they disagreed, the Church did not accept the position either of Paul and Barnabas or of those [others]. But, all of them were referred to the council of the apostles in which St. Peter was present as head and leader. When the council of the apostles assembled and inquired into the matter, they made a decision according to their considered judgment and they attributed their decision to the Holy Spirit; they said, 'It is the Holy Spirit's judgment and ours'[54].

The application of this lesson to the life of the post-apostolic church is almost immediate: 'So it does not belong to anyone, be he bishop or patriarch or anyone else, to say to the church, "Accept from me what I say, apart from all the apostles"'[55]. The procedure described in Acts 15 is, therefore, normative for the life of the church, according to Abū Qurrah. He goes on from here to claim that this conciliar procedure continues to function through the successors of Peter and the apostles.

For Peter's headship in the council of the apostles, Abū Qurrah cites Matt. 16.18, Jn. 21.15-17, and Luc. 22.31-32. From these classic Scripture passages he draws the following conclusion, 'Note that St. Peter is the foundation of the church, charged with the care of the flock; no man's faith shall fail whose

[53] Bacha, *Un traité des œuvres arabes*, 20.
[54] *Ibid.*, 22.
[55] *Ibid.*

faith is ever his'[56]. But this special position is not limited to St. Peter himself, Abū Qurrah argues, nor are the prerogatives of the apostles to decide the affairs of the church in council, with the confirmation of St. Peter, limited to the apostles of the New Testament times. St. Peter's Roman successors continue to exercice his headship, says Abū Qurrah, and the successors of the apostles continue to meet in council to determine the course of ecclesiastical affairs, and to be subject to the affirmation of St. Peter's successors.

Abū Qurrah advances a novel scriptural argument in favor of his view of the pivotal role of the successors of St. Peter to affirm (*at-taṯbīt*) the sucessors of the other apostles in their faith. He takes Christ's charge to Peter as his basic text: 'I have petitioned for you, that you may not vitiate your faith, but turn to your brothers at the right time and confirm them' (Luc. 22.32). As a matter of historical fact, Abū Qurrah now argues, these words could not apply alike to St. Peter himself and to his fellow apostles. They must refer to the successors of St. Peter and the successors of the apostles. For just as Christ said to the Apostles that he would be with them until the end of time (Matt. 28.20), not meaning just those first apostles but their successors and their flocks, so Christ spoke to St. Peter in Luc. 22.32, meaning St. Peter's successors:

The proof of this is that St. Peter himself is the only one of the apostles who vitiated his faith and disbelieved in Christ. Perhaps Christ abandoned him to this simply in order to verify to us that He did not mean him in that saying. We do not see any one of the apostles fallen, nor any one [of them] in need of St. Peter to confirm him[57].

The fact is, as Abū Qurrah sees it, that in the New Testament the other apostles remained faithful, when St. Peter did not. Therefore, the other apostles had no need of his affirmation. The situation is the reverse in post-apostolic times. The successors of the apostles, some of whom have wandered astray, need the affirmation of the successors of St. Peter, who have not fallen away from the true faith, in accordance with Christ's words to St. Peter. So, Abū Qurrah thinks that Satan only began his sifting of the church through the agency of the heresiarchs in post-apostolic times.

Abū Qurrah then applies the basic model he has derived from Acts 15 to the first six general councils of the church, describing these as the only true arbiters of orthodoxy. The pattern is simple and consistent in each instance. First he names the person who proposed the questionable teaching, which a council was called to investigate. In the instance of Nestorius, for example, Abū Qurrah says, 'And when Nestorius went out and said about Christ, what he said and the church refused what he said, she referred it to the Holy Council, according to her custom'[58]. Then Abū Qurrah claims that when

[56] *Ibid.*, 23.
[57] *Ibid.*
[58] *Ibid.*, 24.

each of the six councils gathered together, it was, 'by order of the bishop of Rome (*bi 'amur 'usquf rūmiyyah*)'[59], to conduct an investigation (*an-naẓar*) into the matter referred to it. It is important for Abū Qurrah that no one's opinion was accepted until the decision of the council was delivered. He makes this point especially clear. In the instance of the heresy of Eutyches and Dioscorus (i.e., Monophysitism), for example, he says,

> The Church denied their position and some of the holy fathers rose up to dispute with them, but the church accepted neither their opinion nor that of those who disputed with them. Rather, she referred the matter to the holy council according to her custom[60].

Finally, Abū Qurrah teaches that the opinion of the council is then the opinion of the Holy Spirit, and no one has the right to conduct an investigation (*naẓar*) independently and alongside a council. For example, in the instance of the council of Chalcedon, the church accepted its decision, 'And she knew that she had no right to an investigation apart from this council. She knew for certain that the opinion which emerged from it was unquestionably the opinion of the Holy Spirit'[61]. Therefore, in Abū Qurrah's view, to disagree with the teaching of a council is to disagree with the Holy Spirit.

Abū Qurrah's discussion of each one of the six councils is quite schematic. His purpose is to demonstrate the customary pattern of their occurrence in the life of the church, and to argue that this pattern corresponds to the model described in Acts 15. He defends all six of the ecumenical councils he knows as the measures of orthodoxy in the theological controversies of his own day. Because of the biblically warranted customary pattern he claims for them, Abū Qurrah argues that to reject any one of the six councils admits the logical implication that any one or all of them may be similarly rejected by the interested parties. In his view, this possibility would then involve the reduction of Christianity to 'a form of Judaism', i.e., a mere adherence to the texts of the scriptures without a concern for the meanings which the Holy Spirit meant — the whole point at issue for Abū Qurrah[62]. This allegation then leads him to a discussion of the three major objections which his opponents put against the acceptance of one or more of the councils, usually against the council which rejected their position. The three objections are as follows: that the council made its determination out of ignorance or injustice;

[59] *Ibid.*, 23. 24. 25. 26.
[60] *Ibid.*, 24.
[61] *Ibid.*, 25.
[62] *Ibid.*, 30. On the significance of anti-Jewishness in the Christian apologies in the Islamic context, see S.H. Griffith, 'Jews and Muslims in Christian Syriac and Arabic Texts of the Ninth Century', *Jewish History*, 3 (1988), 65-94. Abū Qurrah's insistence on the authority of the scriptures properly interpreted, and not left uninterpreted, i.e., 'a form of Judaism', is a concern he shares with Maximus Confessor. See J. Pelikan, 'Council or Father or Scripture: the Concept of Authority in the Theology of Maximus Confessor', in D. Neiman and M. Schatkin (eds.), *The Heritage of the Early Church* (OCA 195; 1973), 227-288.

that it was only convoked by some king; or that the previous council had forbidden anything to be added to or subtracted from what it had declared on a given point[63].

The answer to the first objection is clear, Abū Qurrah says. Whoever maintains that a council made its decisions out of ignorance or injustice is simply introducing his own opinion into the question, whereas the Holy Spirit has not committed it to him or to anyone else independently to conduct an investigation into conciliar affairs[64]. As for the second objection, Abū Qurrah admits that the emperors had a hand in the gathering of the councils. In this connection he names Constantine (324-337), Theodosius I (379-395), Theodosius II (408-450), Marcion (450-457), Justinian (527-565), and Constantine IV (668-685). And then he goes on to explain the emperor's role in the church:

> It is necessary for the church to praise Christ, since he made the kings subject to her, that they might serve her fathers and her teachers, because every king in whose time one of these councils convened, was one of the most pious of all, since he supported it by hosting it and restrained the divisions in it so that the fathers might be enabled to investigate into the religion with protection and composure and to carry out its decision. As far as the king himself is concerned, it did not belong to him to investigate into the religious matter or to confirm the decision about anything. He was merely a servant to the fathers, listening to them obediently and accepting whatever they decided in the religious affair without participating with them in any of the investigation[65].

As for the third objection, Abū Qurrah simply observes that the Holy Spirit is not self-contradictory. The cure of an earlier disease, while exclusive for that disease, cannot reasonably be expected to determine the cure for a later disease. Accordingly, Abū Qurrah said,

> No council will say to the church... that it is not right for the fathers, who are her physicians, to gather in council in the future to extirpate a sickness from her, just as this one extirpated the sickness that arose in its own time[66].

So it is according to Abū Qurrah, that the Holy Spirit has made the institution of the councils a perpetual substitute for the apostles, just as Moses made the gatherings of Levites and judges a continuing institution to deal with differences among the Israelites after his own time[67]. And within the parameters of the institution of the councils, the bishop of Rome, as the successor of St. Peter, administers the conciliar deliberations and confirms the orthodoxy of his fellows in the episcopate. In another essay, 'On the Death of Christ', Abū Qurrah states this latter position clearly:

[63] *Ibid.*, 27.
[64] *Ibid.*
[65] *Ibid.*, 28.
[66] *Ibid.*, 29.
[67] *Ibid.*

By the grace of the Holy Spirit, in every circumstance our recourse is simply to build ourselves on the foundation of St. Peter, who administered the six holy councils which were convened by the order of the bishop of Rome, the capital of the world. Whoever is established on her throne is the one entrusted by Christ to turn to the people of the church with his ecumenical council, and to confirm them, as we have established in a number of other places[68].

III

Abū Qurrah Between Rome and Constantinople

Of the issues raised in connection with church councils in Theodore Abū Qurrah's essay 'On Orthodoxy', three in particular are notable from the point of view of one who is interested in the history of the Christian communities in the world of Islam. These three issues are: the institution of the council to speak to the church in the voice of the Holy Spirit; the headship of the bishop of Rome, and his role in summoning a council, and in affirming the faith of his brother bishops; the link between the church council and the executive authority of the Roman emperor. Behind it all in Abū Qurrah's presentation of these familiar themes is the challenge of Islam, on the one hand questioning the integrity of the Christian Bible; on the other hand rejecting what the church teaches about Christ, with the charge that her doctrines were elaborated in politically inspired councils, and that they notably departed from Christ's own life and teaching. One may the most readily discuss these issues from two perspectives, the history of ideas within the Chalcedonian community, which was Abū Qurrah's own allegiance, and the milieu of Christian interconfessional controversy within the world of Islam.

A. *Chalcedonian Perspectives*

Theologically, Abū Qurrah's ideas about the position and the role of the bishop of Rome have most affinity with those elaborated in the years of the Monothelete controversies, prior to the sixth ecumenical council, principally by Maximus Confessor[69]. Two items in particular stand out in what Abū Qurrah says about the bishop of Rome. The first one is his insistence that the Petrine primacy refers not only to Peter himself, but to his successors in the see of Rome, who, like Peter before them, have the responsibility to affirm

[68] Bacha, *Les œuvres arabes*, 70.

[69] See J.-M. Garrigues, 'Le sens de la primauté romaine chez saint Maxime le Confesseur', *Istina*, 21 (1976), 6-24. For the historical context between Constantinople III and Nicea II see also J. Gouillard, 'L'église d'Orient et la primauté romaine au temps de l'iconoclasme', *Istina*, 21 (1976), 25-54, where Theodore Abū Qurrah's ideas are briefly mentioned (51-52), but without any reference to his own historical circumstances. For the broader picture of Byzantine concerns, with no mention of Abū Qurrah, and no reference to the milieu of the church in the Islamic world, see F. Dvornik, *Byzantium and the Roman Primacy* (2nd printing, with corrections; New York, 1979).

their brother bishops, the successors of the apostles, in their faith[70]. Here is not the place to discuss this issue in any detail. One might simply note in passing that Abū Qurrah's ideas in regard to the role of the bishop of Rome in confirming the faith of the other bishops echoes the thought of Maximus, for whom, as one commentator writes, 'the charism of Rome consists in confirming the orthodox faith by guaranteeing the authentic conciliarity of the confession of Christians'[71].

This conciliar dimension for the role for the bishop of Rome accords well with the second notable item in what Abū Qurrah says about this bishop. He insists five times in the essay 'On Orthodoxy', that ecumenical councils gather 'by order of the bishop of Rome'[72]. As Hermann Josef Sieben remarked about the historical inaccuracy of this phrase, 'the obvious stylization of history is theologically conditioned'[73]. And the theological condition according to him is that 'in Theodore's eyes, the participation of the Bishop of Rome belongs to the legitimacy of a council, if not actually the summons and the leadership of the council'[74]. The problem here, of course, is that Abū Qurrah's expression 'by order of', or 'at the bidding of' the bishop of Rome seems too strong, in view of the historical record of the actual summoning of the councils[75]. The overstatement must have a purpose. It is a claim for which Abū Qurrah seems to have had no known authority to cite.

Readers will recall that in another tract, 'On the Death of Christ', Abū Qurrah spoke of 'St. Peter, who administered (*dabbara*) the six holy councils which were convened by the order of the bishop of Rome, the capital of the world'[76]. Here the claim is even more far reaching. So one must assume that Abū Qurrah had pressing reasons for this enhancement of the role of the bishop of Rome in the setting of the ecumenical council. Perhaps the explanation is to be found in his own historical and intellectual circumstances.

One must remember that against the background of Islam's objections to Christianity, Abū Qurrah's immediate purpose was to argue that the Christian Bible is the only credible warrant of religious faith, and that the church council is the only Biblically warranted method of clarifying what the Bible

[70] Abū Qurrah, therefore, did not espouse ideas wholly compatible with those of Father John Meyendorff, 'St. Peter in Byzantine Theology', in J. Meyendorff *et al.*, *The Primacy of Peter* (Leighton Buzzard, Bedfordshire, U.K., 1973²), 7-29.

[71] Garrigues, 'le sens de la primauté', 10. It may not be without significance to recall that Maximus was in all probability born and raised in Palestine, and that he became a monk in the monastery of St. Charitōn, the very monastery where a number of Abū Qurrah's texts were copied. Later Maximus was an associate of patriarch Sophronius. See Brock, 'An Early Syriac Life', esp. 340-343. On the MSS copied at Mar Charitōn, see Griffith, 'Greek into Arabic'.

[72] See n. 59 above.

[73] Sieben, 'Theodore Abû Qurra über "unfehlbare" Konzilien', 186.

[74] *Ibid.*

[75] See *ibid.*, p. 177 and n. 21 for Sieben's remarks.

[76] See n. 68 above.

truly means when doctrinal difficulties arise. Furthermore, in the Islamic milieu, he was pressed to show that these councils did not really answer to the Byzantine civil authority, as the Muslims charged. Rather, Abū Qurrah claimed that they were under the jurisdiction of religious authority, again by Biblical warrant. And the veracity of the Bible, in Abū Qurrah's view, stood firmly on the testimony of the evidentiary miracles worked by the apostles and the disciples in Jesus' name[77]. So just as the Holy Spirit spoke in the Bible, so did he speak in the ecumenical council. In this context Abū Qurrah put forward the Petrine primacy, and interpreted it to mean that it belonged to the bishop of Rome to order the holding of a council, even to administer it, even though the emperor on each occasion is explicitly said to have gathered, or convened it (*ǧama'ahu*)[78]. In this way, on Abū Qurrah's view, through his Roman successors, St. Peter confirmed the faith of his fellow apostles, by confirming the orthodoxy of their successors. In Abū Qurrah's parlance, to obey the teaching of a council is one way 'we might inherit the kingdom of heaven, promised to everyone who builds on the foundation of Mar Peter, that is of the Holy Spirit'[79]. Clearly, a certain theological development has here overtaken what history by itself can reasonably be called upon to verify.

Abū Qurrah's main purpose in the essay 'On Orthodoxy' was to defend the teaching authority of the six ecumenical councils of which he knew, not to make any independent claims for the Petrine primacy. The councils were the important focus for him because in his own milieu the internal Chalcedonian struggle for the orthodox faith was an effort to commend the reception of these councils, in particular the sixth council, to persons in the Syriac and Arabic-speaking community, many of the Chalcedonians among whom, in Abū Qurrah's day, as he claims, were following the lead of some among the Maronites in giving their allegiance to Monotheletism[80]. Among the Melkites, who were swiftly adopting Arabic as their public language, the argument Abū Qurrah joined had been under way since the days of patriarch Sophronius of Jerusalem (d. 638) and Anastasius of Sinai (d.c. 700), not to mention John of Damascus (d.c. 749). Their claim was, as John of Damascus stated most succintly, that since the Monothelites 'proclaim two natures and one hypostasis in Christ, but they hold one will and one operation, thus destroying the

[77] Sieben misses the point of Abū Qurrah's appeal to the probative value of miracles. He did not, *pace* Sieben, emphasize a parallel between miracle and council, nor did he treat the institution of the council as itself an evidentiary miracle. See Sieben, 'Theodore Abû Qurra über 'unfehlbare' Konzilien', 189-191. Rather, in Abū Qurrah's view, the miracles warrant the acceptance of the Scriptures as the Christians have them, and the Scriptures warrant the acceptance of the teaching of the councils.

[78] See Bacha, *Un traité des œuvres arabes*, 27.

[79] *Ibid.*, 33.

[80] See particularly the studies by S.P. Brock listed in n. 39 above.

duality of the natures, they come very close to the teachings of Apollinaris'[81]. In other words, in the Islamic milieu, to refuse to receive the teaching of the sixth council was in Abū Qurrah's view tantamount to joining the Monophysites. In Orthodox eyes, Monophysite ideas were the very ones most liable to elicit hostile Islamic polemic, as Anastasius of Sinai had pointed out almost a century earlier[82]. And Abū Qurrah himself devoted most of his own energies to arguing in Arabic that the Monophysites did not present orthodox Christian doctrine.

Within the Chalcedonian community in the Oriental Patriarchates Abū Qurrah's argument in the essay 'On Orthodoxy' was geared principally to rebut any objection to the reception of the teaching of the sixth council. This was the live issue among the Syriac and Arabic-speaking Melkites of his time and place. Consequently, in tandem with his repeated insistence that the emperors gathered the councils at the bidding of the bishops of Rome, one finds in each instance some variation of the following formula, that after each council, 'the holy church received the doctrine of this council, as she had received the councils [before it,]... and she knew for certain that the opinion (*ar-ra'y*) that emerged from it was without a doubt the opinion of the Holy Spirit'[83].

Therefore, one may say that Abū Qurrah's principal claim is that the Holy Spirit teaches the church through the councils, analogously to the teaching the church receives from the Bible. The role of the bishop of Rome is to confirm orthodoxy, within the context of his fulfillment of Peter's role in a council. The role of the church is to receive the teaching of a council as the teaching of the Holy Spirit, 'and it does not belong to her', as Abū Qurrah says, 'to conduct an investigation alongside the council'[84].

B. *Interconfessional Controvery*

Theodore Abū Qurrah's concern for what Juan-Miguel Garrigues calls the 'charism' of the see of Rome[85] came at a time when in Byzantium all of the theological energies were being consumed in one way or another in the iconoclast controversies. The iconophile council, Nicea II in 787, occurred during Abū Qurrah's lifetime, but, as we have seen, he knew nothing about

[81] B. Kotter, *Die Schriften des Johannes von Damaskos*, vol. IV, Liber de haeresibus et Opera Polemica (Berlin and New York, 1981), 59. The translation here is slightly adapted from F.H. Chase, *Saint John of Damascus, Writings* (The Fathers of the Church; New York, 1958), 152.

[82] See S.H. Griffith, 'Anastasius of Sinai, the *Hodegos*, and the Muslims', *Greek Orthodox Theological Review*, 32 (1987), 341-358.

[83] Bacha, *Un traité des œuvres arabes*, 25; see also 23. 24. 26.

[84] *Ibid.*, 24.

[85] See Garrigues, 'La primauté romaine chez Maxime', 6.

it[86]. His own Arabic tract in defense of the practice of venerating the icons, relying heavily as it did on St. John of Damascus' three Greek orations *Contra Imaginum Calumniatores*[87], nevertheless addressed a situation which obtained in the Christian communities in the caliphate. The problem was that in the oriental patriarchates there were groups of Christians who ceased to make the customary prostration to the holy icons because of the reproaches of Jews and Muslims, and particularly the latter[88]. The situation bore little resemblance to what was going on in Byzantium in the first decade of the ninth century, within which period of time Abū Qurrah wrote his tract. By the year 843 and the re-establishment of Orthodoxy in Byzantium, another event which went unnoticed in the Orient, Abū Qurrah had long since passed away.

The fact is that for all practical purposes, as I have argued elsewhere, the churches in the Islamic world were cut off from Constantinople and were incommunicado with the Byzantine world from the mid-eighth century to well into the tenth century, as Eutychius of Alexandria expressly testifies[89]. Documents originating in Constantinople mention letters to the eastern sees during this period, and record the replies of legates from the east living in exile[90], but in the Orient there is no mention of these affairs. There were numerous refugees, particularly from Palestine, in Constantinople, especially after the teens of the ninth century, as Theophanes and others record[91]. But there is no reliable record of two-way traffic between the sees in this period of roughly a century and a half. In other words, in the Arabophone Melkite churches within the caliphate, and particularly in the monastic communities where theological scholarship managed to survive, the conditions for a somewhat independent doctrinal development briefly but definitely obtained. Scholars have not often recognized it because the deafening roar of Iconoclasm in Byzantium, and of the modern efforts to explain it, has all but drowned out the sound of any other concern. And by the time the icon crisis was resolved, and the ecclesiastical interests of Byzantium shifted in the days of Photius (c. 810-c. 895) to issues associated with the relationship between New Rome and Old Rome (yet another controversy that went practically

[86] See nn. 47 and 51 above.

[87] See B. Kotter (ed.), *Die Schriften des Johannes von Damaskos*, vol. III, *Contra Imaginum Calumniatores Orationes Tres* (Berlin and New York, 1975).

[88] See Dick, Traité du culte des icones, 87-88.

[89] See n. 48 above. Prior to the Abbasid revolution there were numerous contacts between Christians in Byzantium and in the caliphate, *pace* S. Vailhé, 'L'église maronite du V^e au IX^e siècle', *EO* 9 (1906), 257-267. 341-351.

[90] See, e.g., the mention of such communications in W. Treadgold, *The Byzantine Revival, 780-842* (Stanford, California, 1988), 77-78. 221. 290. 311.

[91] See J. Gouillard, 'Un "Quartier" d'émigrés palestiniens à Constantinople au ix^e siècle?', *Revue des Études Sud-Est Européennes*, 7 (1969), 73-76. For Theophanes' remarks see C. De Boor (ed.), *Theophanis Chronographia* (2 vols.; Leipzig, 1883-1885), vol. 1, p. 499.

unnoticed at the time in the churches of the caliphate), no one was paying any attention to the theological concerns of the east.

In Theodore Abū Qurrah's lifetime, while the Byzantines were concerned with the iconoclasts and the theology of the icons, the predominant issue within the Melkite church was still Christology. Chalcedonian orthodoxy had been firmly rooted in the monastic communities of Palestine, the intellectual heart of the Melkite world in early Abbasid times, since the fifth century[92]. And the patriarchate of Jerusalem had remained a bulwark of 'Orthodoxy' throughout the Monenergist and Monothelite controversies of the early Islamic era, as the mere mention of the names of Anastasius of Sinai, Sophronius of Jerusalem and John of Damascus will serve to exemplify[93]. In Abū Qurrah's day the struggle was to maintain the orthodoxy of the six councils in affirmation of the full divinity and the full humanity of Jesus the Messiah, against objections coming from Nestorians, Jacobites and Muslims.

A feature of Christian apologetics in Syriac and Arabic in the early Abbasid period was the appeal writers sometimes made to the Muslims in behalf of the reasonableness of their own Christology, by contrast with that of their fellow Christian adversaries[94]. In this respect, the influence of Islam, and the distinctive Christology of the *Qur'ān*, served to sharpen the Christological debates among the Christians in the caliphate. In Abū Qurrah's instance this effect is particularly noticeable in that while he argued against Nestorians and Jacobites, as well as the Muslims, the Jacobites were the special target of his polemics, because in Abū Qurrah's view their doctrinal formulae played directly into the hands of the Muslim polemicists[95]. The point becomes clear when one realizes the directness of the Islamic challenge. For instance, in an essay on the nations of the civilized world and their religious beliefs, the Muslim writer al-Jāḥiz (d. A.D. 868) had the following to say about what the Byzantines (*ar-Rūm*), that is to say Abū Qurrah's co-religionists, believe about Christ. He wrote:

Had we not seen with our eyes and heard with our ears... we would not have believed that a people, theologians, physicians... would say about a man whom they had seen eating and drinking... then put to death, according to their claim, and crucified, that he is Lord, creator, provident God and that he is eternal, unoriginated... then being as proud of his being killed and crucified as the Jews are proud of killing and crucifying him[96].

[92] See Lorenzo Perrone, *La Chiesa di Palestina e le Controversie Cristologiche* (Brescia, 1980).

[93] See Richard, 'Anastase le Sinaïte'; Christoph von Schönborn, *Sophrone de Jerusalem; vie monastique et confession dogmatique* (Paris, 1972); Alain Riou, *Le monde et l'église selon Maxime le Confesseur* (Paris, 1973). See also John Meyendorff, *Imperial Unity and Christian Divisions* (Crestwood, N.Y., 1989), 333-373.

[94] See, e.g., patriarch Timothy I's remark to the caliph al-Mahdi that the Byzantines 'attribute suffering and death in the flesh to the One who neither suffers or dies', in H. Putman, *L'Église et l'islam sous Timothée I (780-823)* (Beyrouth, 1975), 249-250 (French). 33 (Arabic).

[95] Griffith, 'The Controversial Theology of Theodore Abū Qurrah', 172-221.

[96] Charles Pellat, 'Al-Ğāḥiẓ; les nations civilisées et les croyances religieuses', *Journal Asiatique*, 260 (1967), 99-100.

According to Abū Qurrah, Jacobite Christology falls before challenges such as this one because its doctrinal formulae, if taken literally, unwittingly ascribe change, sufferings, death and containment to the divine nature[97] — the very charge which Muslim polemicists were urging against all Christians. So for Abū Qurrah the argument with the Jacobites was an essential part of the vindication of Christian doctrine in the Arabic-speaking milieu of the Muslims.

Jacobite writers contemporary with Abū Qurrah took notice of his polemic and responded in kind. Ḥabīb ibn Ḫidmah Abū Rā'iṭah, for example, wrote a letter to an Armenian prince in which he refutes Abū Qurrah's arguments, naming him some ten times, and designating Maximus Confessor as his master[98]. And Michael the Syrian much later records the memory of Abū Qurrah preserved in the Syrian Orthodox community, describing him as one who went about the country propagating the teachings of Maximus the Confessor, and remarking that 'because he was a sophist, and engaged in dialectics with the pagans (*ḥanpê*, i.e., the Muslims) and knew the Saracen language, he was an object of wonder to the simple folk'[99].

If Christological controversy with the Jacobites in the Islamic milieu was a major theological preoccupation for Theodore Abū Qurrah, the mention of the name of Maximus the Confessor brings one back to a consideration of Abū Qurrah's own intellectual horizon at the turn of the eighth and ninth centuries. For in that milieu, Abū Qurrah and the Melkites, as their name implies, were deemed by both Muslims and Monophysites to have put their faith in teachings propounded by Roman emperors[100], rather than in the teachings of the Scriptures. And in the tract 'On Orthodoxy' Abū Qurrah defended the position of his community by arguing that the teachings of the six councils of 'Orthodoxy' were in fact based upon the Scriptures and on the scripture-warranted method of discovering the true meaning of scriptural passages. Furthermore, drawing on the heritage of the theology of Maximus Confessor[101], as we have seen, Abū Qurrah elaborated a view of the role of the bishop of Rome in the ecumenical councils which in his view extricated himself and the Melkites from the charge of an emperor-based faith as it was levelled by both Muslims and Monophysites.

Abū Qurrah thus built his theological developments on the clarifications which had emerged in the Monenergist and Monothelite controversies within Chalcedonian circles in the seventh century. As we have seen, the principal supporters of 'Orthodoxy' in these controversies, who thereby put themselves at variance with imperial policy in the matter, were Sophronius of Jerusalem and Maximus Confessor. The latter, we now know, was a Palestinian by birth and one time monk of the monastery of Mar Chariton in the desert of Judah[102], which was an active center of Arabophone theological scholarship in Abū Qurrah's day[103]. What is more, both of these figures had close ties with Rome and with Pope Martin I (655), who had condemned Monothelitism at a synod at the Lateran in 649. Furthermore, also present at the synod and actively supporting it were monks from the monastery of Mar Sabas, who now had a sister house in Rome, together with other Melkite prelates and churchmen from Palestine and Arabia[104]. Theologically all of these participants came to support a view of the primacy of the Roman see in bringing theological disputes to conciliation which would be grist for Abū Qurrah's mill just over a century after the sixth ecumenical council, held in Constantinople in 680/681. In his letter to emperor Constantine IV (668-685) on this occasion, Pope Agatho (678-681) voiced a conviction which Abū Qurrah would later echo in his tract 'On Orthodoxy'. The Pope claimed that the church of Rome had 'never departed from the way of the truth', and was 'never obscured by any heresy'[105].

When more than a hundred years later Abū Qurrah was active as a controversialist in the Chalcedonian cause there were two groups within the Syriac and Arabic-speaking Christian communities who were his principal adversaries. They were the Jacobites, as we have seen, and the Maronites. For Abū Qurrah the latter were Monothelites[106]. And it was in response to them in the first place that the full weight of the tract 'On Orthodoxy' was brought to bear. This was the circumstance which provided Abū Qurrah the opportunity to enhance the role of the bishop of Rome in his account of the functioning

[97] See I. Dic, 'Deux écrits inédits de Théodore Abuqurra', *Mus* 72 (1959), 59.

[98] Georg Graf, *Die Schriften des Jacobiten Ḥabīb ibn Ḫidma Abū Rā'iṭa* (CSCO 130 and 131; 1951), 73ff., esp. 79.

[99] J.B. Chabot, *Chronique de Michel le syrien; patriarche jacobite d'Antioche (1166-1199)* (4 vols.; Paris, 1899-1910), vol. 3, 32 (French), vol. 4, 495-496 (Syriac).

[100] The term 'Melkites' in this sense means 'king's men' (βασιλικοί), and was used of the Chalcedonians in the east by the Jacobites, in a pejorative way. See the remarks of J.R. Assemanus, *Bibliotheca Orientalis Clementino-Vaticana* I (Rome, 1719), 507-509. See also J. Spencer Trimingham, *Christianity among the Arabs in Pre-Islamic Times* (London and New York, 1979), 213. Among Muslims the term appears already in the works of the tenth century writer al-Mas'ūdi. See C. Charon, 'L'origine ethnographique des Melkites', *EO* 11 (1908), 90.

[101] See Garrigues, 'Le sens de la primauté'; Gouillard, 'L'église d'Orient et la primauté romaine'; Riou, *Le monde et l'église*, 206-212.

[102] See Sebastian Brock, 'An Early Syriac Life', 304 (Syriac). 315 (English). 321 (Commentary).

[103] See Griffith, 'Stephen of Ramlah'.

[104] See Jean-Marie Sansterre, *Les moines grecs et orientaux à Rome aux époques byzantine et carolingienne (milieu du VI^e s. — fin du IX^e s.)* (2 vols.; Bruxelles, 1980), vol. 1, esp. 22-30. 115-127.

[105] Quoted in the translation of J. Meyendorff, *Imperial Unity*, 370.

[106] In his edition of the text of 'On Orthodoxy', Bacha systematically changed Abū Qurrah's use of the word 'Maronites' to 'Monothelites'. See n. 39 above. In his letter in defense of the addition to the *Trishagion*, Ḥabīb ibn Ḫidmah Abū Rā'iṭah distinguished between 'a Melkite Maximist Chalcedonian' and the 'Melkite Maronite Chalcedonians'. See Graf, *Die Schriften des Abū Rā'iṭa*, vol. 130, 79. See also Brock, 'A Syriac Fragment', 69-71.

of the ecumenical councils. For, as Chalcedonians, the Maronites already would have accepted the orthodoxy of the first five councils, and, like Abū Qurrah, in the Syriac-speaking milieu they would already have had to defend their allegiance to the 'Tome of Leo', Pope Leo I's (d. 461) letter of the year 449 to patriarch Flavián of Constantinople (447-449), which was accepted at the council of Chalcedon (451) as an orthodox statement of the doctrine of the Incarnation, and received with the remark, 'Peter has spoken thus through Leo'[107].

Leo's *Tome* was a point of contention between Chalcedonians and Jacobites in the Syriac-speaking milieu already in the sixth century[108]. And in it and other works of Leo there are essential elements of the line of thinking which appears in Abū Qurrah's tract 'On Orthodoxy', such as Petrine primacy, the importance of the consensus of the fathers, and the idea of the inspiration of the Holy Spirit in the teaching of a council[109]. In his tract 'On the Death of Christ', largely addressed to Jacobites, Abū Qurrah said,

> From the words of the holy fathers we have adduced every sort of example, in thirty tractates which we composed in Syriac as a commendation for the opinion of Orthodoxy and for the statement of the holy Mar Leo, the bishop of Rome[110].

Perhaps it is not too far fetched to propose that the historical explanation for Abū Qurrah's elaboration of the scenario according to which the bishops of Rome administered the ecumenical councils, lay in his conflation of the image of Leo at Chalcedon as he imagined it, with the theology of Maximus Confessor[111]. What pressured him to make this theological 'quantum leap' was the situation in which he actually found himself, having to answer Jacobites and Maronites on the one hand, and on the other hand having to argue against the Muslims that the Melkite creed was both based on the scriptures, and free of any implication of political or religious allegiance to the Roman emperors of Byzantium. For, according to Abū Qurrah, the councils, which the scriptures themselves warranted, were gathered, not at the

[107] Quoted in the translation of Henry R. Percival (ed.), *The Seven Ecumenical Councils of the Undivided Church; their Canons and Dogmatic Decrees* (Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers 14; reprint, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1983), 259.

[108] Timothy Aelurus' line by line refutation of Leo's *Tome* was available in a Syriac translation before A.D. 562. See R.Y. Ebied and L.R. Wickham, 'Timothy Aelurus: Against the Definition of the Council of Chalcedon', in Laga, Munitz, Van Rompay, *After Chalcedon*, 115-166. See also P. Mouterde, 'Les versions syriaques du Tome de saint Léon', *Mélanges de l'Université Saint-Joseph* 16 (1932), 121-165. Melkite versions of the *Tome* in Syriac were available well before the early eighth century. Mouterde, 127.

[109] See Aloys Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, vol. 2, part 1, 'From Chalcedon to Justinian I', trans. P. Allen and J. Cawte (Atlanta, Ga., 1987), 120-149.

[110] Bacha, *Les œuvres arabes*, 60-61.

[111] It is interesting to note that Abū Qurrah's Byzantine contemporary and fellow spirit, St. Theodore of Studios (759-826), in a letter to Pope Leo III (d. 816), remarked that 'a legitimate synod has to be approved by your divine primacy (πρωταρχία)', PG 99, col. 1020.

behest of the emperors, but at the bidding of the bishops of Rome. One must admit that in context this theological rationale does not lack theoretical ingenuity, although it may not stand up to the scrutiny of modern scholars, who have access to historical documents which could have been beyond Theodore Abū Qurrah's reach. Doubtless Abū Qurrah would suggest that the documents of history must themselves be properly interpreted.

VII

Muḥammad and the Monk Baḥîrâ: Reflections on a Syriac and Arabic Text from Early Abbasid Times

In Syriac-speaking communities, from sometime in the ninth century until virtually the present day, a story has circulated according to which the prophet Muḥammad received his early religious instruction from an errant Christian monk of the east. The story is couched within the framework of an apocalyptical narrative which builds on earlier Christian apocalypses in Syriac composed in the early years of the eighth century. The text has been published since the years 1898-1903, but few scholars have paid much attention to it as an exercise in Christian literary apologetics.[1] Rather, the work has mostly attracted the attention of scholars bent either on tracing the history of Christian apocalyptic texts, or on investigating the many reports, Muslim as well as Christian, of Muḥammad's encounter with the monk Sargis/Baḥîrâ, whose principal claim to fame in Islamic lore is to have recognized the signs of prophethood in connection with the person of the youthful Muḥammad.[2] It is the purpose of the present article to review this important work from the point of view of its role as an exercise in Christian literary apologetics. Accordingly, the study will unfold under three major headings: the text in its present forms and the literary history of the work; the disputational design of its arguments; and its place in the Christian controversial literature of the early Islamic period.

1 See Richard Gottheil, "A Christian Bahira Legend," *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie* 13 (1898), pp. 189-242; 14 (1899), pp. 203-268; 15 (1900), pp. 56-102; 17 (1903), pp. 125-166. Gottheil read a paper on the Baḥîrâ legend before the members of the American Oriental Society in May, 1887. See Richard J. H. Gottheil, "A Syriac Bahîrâ Legend," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 13 (1889), pp. clxxvii-clxxxi. In the course of the lecture he announced that the text of the legend would be published in the Society's journal. Instead, it appeared in the *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie*.

2 See most recently Stephen Gero, "The Legend of the Monk Bahira; the Cult of the Cross and Iconoclasm," in P. Canivet & J-P. Rey-Coquais (eds.) *La Syrie de Byzance à l'Islam* (Damas: Institut Français de Damas, 1992), pp. 47-57. Gero's article contains copious references to the most important earlier bibliography.

I. The Story and its History

A. The Text

The Christian Baḥîrâ story has survived in both Syriac and Arabic versions. The Syriac manuscripts known to contain it are all of a relatively recent vintage, and they emanate from both West Syrian ('Jacobite') and East Syrian ('Nestorian') milieux.[3] While they all agree on the essential outline of the story, there are so many variations in the telling that in his edition of the text Richard Gottheil opted to publish the West Syrian and East Syrian recensions side by side rather than to attempt to re-constitute the common original from which, in his judgment, they may be presumed to descend.[4] The variations in fact testify not only to the composite origins of the story, as we shall see, but to its timely topicality in the communities in which it continues to circulate. Each hand which has copied it seems to have contributed refinements of its own to the telling, thereby signifying the story's continuing interest.

The Arabic version of the Christian Baḥîrâ story survives in at least nine known manuscripts dating from the fifteenth through the eighteenth centuries.[5] While there are shorter and longer recensions among them, Gottheil based his edition on three manuscripts from the fifteenth, the sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries respectively, which all represent the same, fuller recension of the text. He cites an occasional reading from other manuscripts, but otherwise made no attempt to produce a critical edition. This state of affairs allows one to conclude only that the work was popular among Arab Christian readers, without providing enough evidence to chart its history in any more concrete way. Clearly, a modern, critical edition of the text is a scholarly *desideratum.*

The story-line is the same in both the Syriac and Arabic versions, and the outline is simple. There is a frame-story in which a monk-narrator (Ishoʿyahb in Syriac, Murhib in Arabic[6]) tells of his encounter with the fugitive monk Baḥîrâ

3 One knows of a copy made as recently as 1971 for the use of the current Syrian Orthodox Archbishop of the Americas. The three Syriac manuscripts used by Gottheil all date from the nineteenth century. See Gottheil, "A Christian Bahira Legend," 13 (1898), pp. 199-200.

4 See Gottheil, "A Christian Bahira Legend," 13 (1898), p. 200. A truly critical edition of the Syriac text, based on all the available manuscripts, is in the planning stages, under the direction of Prof. G. J. Reinink of the Dutch Rijksuniversiteit at Groningen.

5 See Gottheil, "A Christian Bahira Legend," 13 (1898), pp. 200-201. See also Georg Graf, *Geschichte der christlichen arabischen Literatur* (vol. II, Studi e Testi, no. 133; Vatican City, 1947), p. 149.

6 The voweling of the Arabic name is uncertain. 'Murhib' is Gottheil's choice; 'Murhab' is another possibility, but neither of them are known Arabic names. One scholar has made the ingenious suggestion that the text be emended to read 'Mawhib', that is to say 'Gift', a reading which would correspond somewhat with the meaning of the Syriac name, i.e., 'Jesus has given'. He notes that the letters 'r' and 'w' can resemble one another in some Arabic hands. See J. Bignami-Odier & M. G. Levi Della Vida, "Une version latine de l'apocalypse syro-arabe de Serge-Bahira," *Mélan-*

(called Sargis-Baḥîrâ in Syriac). The narrator recounts the story of Baḥîrâ's adventures, tells of his experience of apocalyptic visions, of his encounters with Muḥammad, and of the monk's prophetic vision of the hardships to come with life under the Muslims. Within the text bounded by the frame-work story then there are three major divisions of material in the narrative: the apocalyptic vision of the coming rule of the Arab 'Ishmaelites,' the 'sons of Hagar,' as the text calls the Muslims;[7] an account of the catechizing of Muḥammad by Baḥîrâ; and the prediction, or prophecy *ex eventu*, of the course of Islamic history from the time of Muḥammad to the projected coming of the Mahdī, and the end-time when, according to the text, the Christian emperor of the Romans will, by God's grace and dispensation, set the world aright once again.

It is clear from the outline of the story that a Christian writer has chosen as his leitmotif the well known episode in the biography of the prophet Muḥammad, in which a monk, called only by the epithet *baḥīrah*, an Arabic calque on the Syriac title of honor for monks, *baḥîrâ*, recognizes the signs of Muḥammad's prophethood. As in Islamic sources, so in this story, Baḥîrâ lives in a hut by a well, where nomad Arabs come for water. On one such occasion the monk unexpectedly singles out the teen-aged Muḥammad among his visitors, recognizes and foretells his prophetic career. For all practical purposes, the details aside, this is all there is to the Islamic account. But in the Christian writer's hands Baḥîrâ acquires a story of his own. He is an errant monk with a troubled past. And into his story the Christian author grafts examples of two genres of writing which were common in the Syriac and Arabic-speaking communities of Christians in the early Islamic period: apocalypse and apologetics. There does not seem to be any reason to suppose that there were independent memories of Baḥîrâ in the Christian communities. As we shall argue below, the best hypothesis seems to be that the Christian story is a clever construct, not lacking in verisimilitude, which builds on well-known Islamic lore, to serve as a literary vehicle for a Christian response to the civil and religious pressure of Islam. It provides the Christian reader not only with a way religiously to account for the rise of Islam and the course of its history, but it also suggests that Islam is actually a misunderstood form of Christianity. And it provides the Christian reader with apologetic strategies for rebutting Islamic objections to Christian doctrines.

ges d'Archéologie et d'Histoire 62 (1950), p.129, n.4. Alternatively, Stephen Gero prefers the vocalization 'Marhab', and he suggests that it represents an elision of the monk's full title and name, viz., Mar Ishô' Yahb. See Gero, "The Legend of the Monk Bahira," p.52, n.36.

7 These are standard epithets for Muslims in Christian texts in Syriac and Arabic. They are theologically suggestive terms, with polemical overtones. See S.H. Griffith, "The Prophet Muhammad, his Scripture and his Message according to the Christian Apologies in Arabic and Syriac from the First Abbasid Century," in T. Fahd (ed.), *La vie du prophète; colloque de Strasbourg – 1980* (Paris, 1983), pp.122-123. See also the remarks in S.H. Griffith, "Free Will in Christian *Kalām*: Moshe bar Kepha against the Teachings of the Muslims," *Le Muséon* 100 (1987), pp.151-154.

The frame story tells the tale of Sargis-Baḥîrâ in different ways in the Syriac and Arabic versions. The differences have been meticulously detailed by earlier commentators.[8] Suffice it to say here that the monk is called by the double name Sargis-Baḥîrâ in Syriac, while in Arabic, as in the Islamic story, he is called simply Baḥîrâ.[9] And in Syriac there is a much fuller account of Sargis-Baḥîrâ's ecclesiastical affiliations with seemingly 'Nestorian' hierarchs, while in Arabic he is said simply to be "of the people of Antioch."[10] In Arabic the narrator-monk, Murhib *ar-rāhib*, meets Baḥîrâ in a desert monastery, the location of which is not specified, but it is in the desert "near the Ishmaelites."[11] In Syriac, the narrator-monk Isho'yahb, after having toured the famous sites of desert monasticism, meets Sargis-Baḥîrâ in "the desert of Yathrib."[12] In both versions Sargis-Baḥîrâ is himself an ecclesiastical fugitive who has sought refuge in the remote desert because of the irregularity of his view that in Christian churches there should be only one wooden cross to receive the veneration of the worshippers – no more than one, and no cross of precious metals, nor any ornamented with gems. He had worn out his welcome in Christian communities by vandalizing crosses which did not meet his approval.

In the Syriac versions of the story of Sargis-Baḥîrâ the apocalyptic sections are the most important features, and they occupy by far the most space in the texts. This prominence of the apocalyptic genre is not surprising, given the fact that in the Syriac-speaking communities apocalypses were the most important literary reactions to the challenge of Islam, from the time of the caliph 'Abd al-Malik (685-705) until the Abbasid revolution, as we shall see below. In the Baḥîrâ story the apocalyptic sections have two foci. The first part, which details Sargis-Baḥîrâ's vision at Sinai about the coming rule of the 'Ishmaelites' is an apocalypse in the vintage Danielesque style, which owes a large debt to the earlier apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius, itself an originally Syriac composition.[13] In fact, in the

8 See Gero, "The Legend of the Monk Bahira."

9 See A. Abel, "Bahîrâ," *EI*, new ed., vol. I (1960), pp.922-923. The name Sargis/Sergius for the monk was not unknown to Muslims. Al-Mas'ûdi says that Baḥîrâ is called by this name in Christian writings. See C. Pellat (ed.), *Mas'ûdi; les prairies d'or* (vol. I; Beirut, 1966), p.83. The name Sargis/Sergius was common among Syriac and Arabic-speaking Christians. The popularity of the cult of St. Sergius is evident also in the number of churches and sanctuaries dedicated to him. See R.B. Serjeant, "Saint Sergius," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 22 (1959), pp.574-575. His main shrine and *martyrion* was at Rusafah/Sergiopolis in Syria. See M. Mackensen, *Resafa I: eine befestigte spätantike Anlage vor den Stadtmauern von Resafa* (Mainz am Rhein, 1984); T. Ulbert, *Resafa II; die Basilika des heiligen Kreuzes in Resafa-Sergiopolis* (Mainz am Rhein, 1986).

10 Gottheil, "A Christian Bahira Legend," 14 (1899), p.254.

11 Gottheil, "A Christian Bahira Legend," 14 (1899), p.260.

12 Gottheil, "A Christian Bahira Legend," 13 (1898), p.203.

13 See F.J. Martinez, "Eastern Christian Apocalyptic in the Early Muslim Period: Pseudo-Methodius and Pseudo-Athanasius," (Ph.D. Dissertation, The Catholic University of America; Washington, D.C., 1985); G.J. Reinink, *Die syrische Apokalypse des Pseudo-Methodius* (CSCO, vols. 540 & 541; Leuven: Peeters, 1993).

Arabic version, the text refers explicitly to Methodius twice.[14] Both the Arabic and the Syriac versions then say that Sargis-Baḥîrâ brought the warning of his vision to the Byzantine emperor Maurice and the Persian emperor Chosroes, to no avail.

The second apocalyptic section of the Baḥîrâ story comes after the report of the monk's encounter with Muḥammad in both versions. In this section the accent is on the *ex eventu* prophecy of the conditions of life for Christians under Islam until the projected coming of the Mahdî and the inception of the events of the end-time. There are references not only to the many disabilities to be suffered by Christians, but pointed references to numerous Christians who will have become Ishmaelites. Here, and throughout the apocalyptic sections of the work there are a number of allusions to Islamic history and lore which have given scholars some points of reference for their efforts to date the text, as we shall see below.

In the Arabic version of the Baḥîrâ story, in sharp contrast to the Syriac versions, the monk's encounter with Muḥammad is the longest and obviously the most important part of the narrative. Here, in both versions, the *Qur'ān* is the focus of attention; the text claims that effectively Baḥîrâ is the author of this new scripture. In the Syriac versions of the report of the encounter, the narrator-monk, Ishô'yahb, has the story not from Sargis-Baḥîrâ himself but from a disciple named Ḥâkim, whom Ishô'yahb met only after Baḥîrâ's death. He is said to have reported the gist of the conversations between Muḥammad and the monk, and he also tells the tale according to which Baḥîrâ contrived to have the scripture destined to become the *Qur'ān* arrive, seemingly miraculously, in the midst of a gathering of Muḥammad and his followers. In its original form, as the story goes, the *Qur'ān* contained Christian truth told in a form suitable for Arab ears. But in the Syriac telling, in the end the text that was to become the *Qur'ān* first came into the possession of Jews and was distorted into the familiar form of it we now have, at the hands of a scribe variously called Ka'b, Kalef, and Kaleb, who seems to have been none other than the Jewish early convert to Islam, well-known from Islamic sources, Ka'b al-Aḥbar.[15] There are also a number of other anti-Jewish remarks in both versions, to which we shall call further attention below.

In the Arabic version of the Baḥîrâ story the author has expanded the section reporting Muḥammad's encounter with the monk to become the major part of the text. It includes numerous quotations from the *Qur'ān*, supplying in each instance the Christian understanding of the passage which the author says Baḥîrâ

14 See Gottheil, "A Christian Bahira Legend," 14 (1899), p. 262 and 15 (1900), p. 71.
15 See the discussion below, and the references in n. 74.

actually intended to communicate to the Arabs. In fact, throughout the section Baḥîrâ speaks in the first person, as reported by the monk Murhib.

Clearly, the text of the Christian Baḥîrâ story in both its Syriac and Arabic versions is an artfully conceived exercise in apocalypse and apologetic, carefully plotted and well articulated. It depends not only on earlier Syriac apocalypses, and Islamic traditions about the monk Baḥîrâ, but on Christian modes of apologetics in Arabic and Syriac as well. It is in fact a hybrid of Christian modes of discourse in Syriac and Arabic in the early Islamic period, the literary history of which will help to propose a suggested date for its composition and the ecclesiastical milieu of its first appearance. And this is also the framework within which the question of the relationship of the Syriac and Arabic versions to one another will most naturally come up for discussion.

B. Literary History

Stephen Gero, the most recent scholar to give a close scrutiny to the text of the Christian Baḥîrâ legend, concludes that in its present form it is a composite work. He says,

> The oldest layer of the Christian Bahira legend is in fact the first part, the apocalypse proper in the context of the autobiographical narrative; this section, as the Latin version demonstrates, had at some point an independent literary existence, perhaps already in the ninth century; the other sections, with the echoes of the Muslim tradition proper about Muhammad and the citations of the Qur'anic material, were added piecemeal later.[16]

Gero's mention of the "Latin version" refers to the translation of the first part of the Baḥîrâ legend which was done into Latin by the early years of the fourteenth century.[17] On the basis of certain syntactic and stylistic features of the version, the editors of the Latin text have suggested that the translation was made from an Arabic original. Since this Latin version contains only the first part of the story as we have it in the published Syriac and Arabic texts, including only the account of the monk's vision at Sinai and his settlement in the territory of the Ishmaelites, these same scholars have concluded that the Latin version preserves an earlier form of the story, perhaps even the original Christian Baḥîrâ legend, before it was embellished with the additional features one now finds in the available Syriac and Arabic texts. On this account, the Arabic text from which the Latin version was made is presumed to have been itself a translation from the Syriac original of the Baḥîrâ legend.[18] Be this as it may, it is nevertheless clear that the

16 Gero, "The Legend of the Monk Bahira," p. 55.
17 See Bignami-Odier & M. G. Levi Della Vida, "Une version latine."
18 See Bignami-Odier & M. G. Levi Della Vida, "Une version latine," p. 133.

substance of the apocalyptic vision which came to be part of the legend would already have been available to the original composer of the Baḥîrâ story in the eighth century apocalypses which are the earliest literary responses to the challenge of Islam to be found in Syriac.

Recent studies, particularly those by Han J. W. Drijvers and Gerrit Reinink, have called attention to a number of Syriac compositions of an apocalyptic character which were produced by Syriac writers in the Syro-Mesopotamian milieu in the Umayyad period, beginning in the reign of the caliph ʿAbd al-Malik (685-705). The *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius* is the most well known of these compositions, but in the same breath one might also mention the Syriac *Gospel of the Twelve Apostles*, and the so-called *Edessene Apocalypse*.[19] All of these texts, as Reinink and Drijvers have shown, have their roots deep in Syrian tradition as far back as Ephraem the Syrian (d.373), and they rely heavily on motifs found in such earlier works as the *Romance of Julian*, the *Alexander Legend*, and the *Judas Cyriacus Legend*. For the most part these texts seem to have been composed in a Syrian Orthodox ('Jacobite') milieu, although they became widely popular throughout the Syriac-speaking world.[20] They attempted to make sense of the rise of Islam and the rule of the Muslims in terms of the traditional eastern Christian exegesis of the book of Daniel. In this sense, while the texts are often highly polemical against Islam, they are very much intra-Christian documents. And they would have been readily available to the composer of the Christian Baḥîrâ legend.

19 See F. J. Martinez, "Eastern Christian Apocalyptic in the Early Muslim Period: Pseudo-Methodius and Pseudo-Athanasius," (Ph. D. Dissertation, The Catholic University of America; Washington, D.C., 1985); *idem*, "The Apocalyptic Genre in Syriac: the World of Pseudo-Methodius," in H. J. W. Drijvers *et al.* (eds.), *IV Symposium Syriacum 1984* (Orientalia Christiana Analecta, 229: Rome, 1987), pp.337-352; H. Suermann, *Die geschichtstheologische Reaktion auf die einfallenden Muslime in der edessenischen Apokalyptik des 7. Jahrhunderts* (Frankfurt a.M., 1985); *idem*, "Der byzantinische Endkaiser bei Pseudo-Methodios," *Oriens Christianus* 71 (1987), pp.140-155; G. J. Reinink, "Pseudo-Methodius und die Legende vom römischen Endkaiser," in W. Verbeke *et al.* (eds.), *The Use and Abuse of Eschatology in the Middle Ages* (Leuven, 1988), pp.82-111; H. J. W. Drijvers, "Christians, Jews and Muslims in Northern Mesopotamia in Early Islamic Times; the Gospel of the Twelve Apostles and Related Texts," and G. J. Reinink, "The Romance of Julian the Apostate as a Source for Seventh Century Apocalypses," in P. Canivet & J-P. Rey-Coquais (eds.), *La Syrie de Byzance a l'Islam*, pp.67-74 & 75-86; G.J. Reinink, "Ps.-Methodius: a Concept of History in Response to the Rise of Islam," and Han J. W. Drijvers, "The Gospel of the Twelve Apostles: a Syriac Apocalypse from the Early Islamic Period," in A. Cameron & L. I. Conrad (eds.), *The Byzantine and Early Islamic Near East* (Studies in Late Antiquity and Early Islam, I: Problems in the Literary Source Material; Princeton, N.J., 1992), pp.149-187 & 189-213.

20 The problem of the community of origin for these texts is still not completely solved. It is difficult to judge between the Melkite community and the Jacobite community. For Pseudo-Methodius, for example, Martinez opts for a Melkite origin, while Reinink chooses the Jacobite option. See Martinez, "Eastern Christian Apocalyptic", and Reinink, "Ps.-Methodius: a Concept of History." The same ambivalence will emerge in the case of the Christian Baḥîrâ Legend.

The genius of the author of the Christian Baḥîrâ legend was to have chosen the Islamic story of Muḥammad's encounter with the monk as the center-piece for his work of apocalypse and apologetics. The Islamic story was widespread by the ninth century. It appears already in Muḥammad ibn Isḥāq's (d.767) biography of the prophet as it has survived in the recension of Ibn Hishām (d. 834).[21] The appearance of the Baḥira story in Ibn Isḥāq's *Sīrah* reminds the reader that such a document itself had an apologetical/polemical agenda.[22] In it Baḥîrâ's recognition of the sign of prophecy on the person of the youthful Muḥammad was one of a series of *topoi* in the narrative, designed to show that the prophet's coming was expected, foretold, and recognized by earlier 'scripture people'. The Christian writer's adoption of this motif as the center-piece for his narrative shows his recognition of the fact that in the Islamic story the figure of Baḥîrâ was already a character in the drama of inter-religious controversy. And it is worth noting that in the *sīrah* account, in aid of his recognition of the signs of Muḥammad's future prophethood, Baḥîrâ is said to have asked him a number of questions about himself which the future prophet readily answered, enabling the monk to verify the distinguishing characteristics of Muḥammad's vocation. This brief interrogatory dialogue is the feature of the story which in the Christian writer's hands was expanded to become what we may call "the catechesis of Muḥammad."[23]

In Christian sources too there are early reports of Muḥammad's alleged encounter with a monk. One finds them in the heresiography of John of Damascus (d. c. 749), where Muḥammad is said to have been in dialogue with an Arian monk,[24] and in the chronicles of Theophanes (d. 817), and of George Hamartolos (fl. 866), which report that Muḥammad's wife received reassurances about his experience of revelation from "a monk exiled for false belief" and living among the Arabs.[25]

By the mid-eighth century it was already clear to writers such as Anastasius of

21 See Th. ʿAbd ar-Raʾūf Saʿd (ed.), *As-Sīrah an-Nabawiyyah* (4 vols.; Beirut, 1975), vol. I, pp.165-167. Among other Islamic sources, the story of Bahîrâ also appears in the biographical traditions transmitted in Ibn Saʿd's *aṭ-Ṭabaqāt al-Kabīr*. See E. Mittwock & E. Sachau (eds.), *Ibn Saad, Biographien* (vol.I; Leiden, 1917), pp.99-101.

22 See J. Wansbrough, *The Sectarian Milieu; Content and Composition of Islamic Salvation History* (Oxford, 1978).

23 Mention of "le catechisation de Mahomet" seems first to have been mentioned in Bignami-Odier & Levi Della Vida, "Une version latine," p.133.

24 See the text quoted and discussed in Daniel J. Sahas, *John of Damascus on Islam; the "Heresy of the Ishmaelites,"* (Leiden, 1972), p.132; R. Le Coz, *Jean Damascène, écrits sur l'islam* (Sources Chrétiennes, n.383; Paris, 1992), pp.97-98, 210-212.

25 Carolus de Boor (ed.), *Theophanis Chronographia* (2 vols.: Leipzig, 1883 & 1885), vol. I., p.334. Carolus de Boor (ed.), *Georgius Monachus Chronicon* (2 vols.; Leipzig, 1904), vol. II, p.699.

Sinai,[26] John of Damascus,[27] the writer of the dialogue of the Syrian Patriarch John III with the emir ʿUmayr ibn Ṣaʿd al-Anṣarī, and the composer of the dialogue between the monk of Bêt Ḥālê and an Arab notable,[28] to name only a few, that Christology was the main isssue between Muslims and Christians. In the theological vocabulary of all the contemporary Christian denominations, the label 'Arian' fairly well expressed the intra-Christian theological judgment about the Islamic view ʿIsā ibn Maryam. For 'Melkites' and 'Jacobites' the further label 'Nestorian' served the same purpose. Indeed this Christian characterization of the situation seems even to have found its way back into the Islamic apologetical/polemical tradition. For there is yet another episode in the biography of the prophet Muḥammad in which he is said to have encountered a monk who recognized his prophetic vocation. According to the tradition, as a young man in the employ of his future wife Khadījah, Muḥammad came once with a merchant caravan to Syria, there a monk whom Islamic tradition calls *Nasṭûr* (Nestorius?) is said to have recognized him as a future prophet.[29]

The dialogue of the monk of Bêt Ḥālê with a Muslim notable, which was in all probability composed in the 720's, is the earliest Christian text actually to mention the monk Baḥîrâ by name. In it the monk tells his Muslim interlocutor that Muḥammad's teaching of monotheism was "the doctrine he had received from Sargis-Baḥîrâ."[30]

An Arab Christian apologetical/polemical text with its roots in the ninth century, the correspondence between ʿAbd Allāh ibn Ismaʿīl al-Hāshimī and ʿAbd al-Masīḥ ibn Isḥāq al-Kindī melded the figures of Sargis-Baḥîrâ and the monk *Nasṭûr*. The text claims that Sargis-Baḥîrâ, "gave himself the name Nestorius, wanting by the change to prop up the doctrine of Nestorius to which he adhered and which he professed."[31] The monk succeeded in weaning Muḥammad away from idolatry, the text says, and "he made him his disciple and a propagator of

26 See S.H. Griffith, "Anastasios of Sinai, the *Hodegos*, and the Muslims," *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 32 (1987), pp. 341-358; John Haldon, "The Works of Anastasius of Sinai: a Key Source for the History of Seventh-Century East Mediterranean Society and Belief," in Cameron and Conrad, *The Byzantine and Early Islamic Near East*, pp. 107-147.

27 See Sahas, *John of Damascus on Islam*.

28 See S.H. Griffith, "Disputes with Muslims in Syriac Christian Texts: from Patriarch John (d. 648) to Bar Hebraeus (d.1286)," in B. Lewis & F. Niewöhner (eds.), *Religionsgespräche im Mittelalter* (Wolfenbütteler Mittelalter-Studien, 4; Wiesbaden, 1992), pp.257-261.

29 ʿAbd ar-Raʾūf Saʿd, *As-Sīrah an-Nabawiyyah*, vol. I, p. 172; Mittwoch & Sachau, *Ibn Saad, Biographien*, vol. I, pp. 82-83. A character named *Nasṭûr* also appears in Jewish polemical texts of the early Islamic period. See Daniel J. Lasker, "Qissat Mujadalat al-Usquf and Nestor Ha-Komer; the earliest Arabic and Hebrew anti-Christian Polemics," in J. Blau & S.C. Reif (eds.), *Genizah Research after Ninety Years: the Case of Judaeo-Arabic* (Cambridge, 1992), pp. 112-118.

30 Diyarbakir MS 95, f. 9.

31 Georges Tartar, "Dialogue Islamo-Chrétien sous le calife al Ma'mûn (813-834); les epîtres d'al-Hashimi et d'al-Kindi," (2 vols.; Combs-la-Ville, France: Centre Èvangelique de Temoignage et de Dialogue, 1982), vol. I., p. 107; vol. II, p. 112.

the religion of Nestorius."[32] The most sensible construction to put upon this remark is to see in it a polemical characterization of the faith in which Baḥîrâ is said to have instructed Muḥammad. That is to say, the Christian composer of the al-Hāshimī/al-Kindī correspondence was himself probably a 'Melkite' or a 'Jacobite'.[33]

In the ninth century the Muslims too put the Baḥîrâ story to a further polemical purpose in the on-going religious confrontation with Christians. For example, the *Muʿtazilī littérateur* al-Jâḥiẓ (d. 869), in his *Kitāb ar radd ʿalā n-naṣārā*, wrote that the Christians whom the *Qurʾān* says are "the nearest in loving friendship to those who believe" (*al-Māʾidah*, V:82) were not those with whom he, al-Jāḥiẓ, was arguing in the ninth century. Rather, he said, "God did not mean these Christians nor their like, i.e., the 'Melkites' and the 'Jacobites'. He meant the likes of Baḥîrâ and the monks who were at the service of Salmān."[34]

Together with the Syriac apocalypses and the stories about Muḥammad's encounter with a monk, both Christian and Islamic, the author of the Christian Baḥîrâ legend also had at hand a growing supply of dispute texts, particularly in Syriac and Arabic, to inspire him.[35] No small part of his own literary genius in this line is displayed in the middle section of his work, the catechesis of Muḥammad. Here there is a marked difference in the Syriac and the Arabic versions of the story. In Syriac the catechizing of Muḥammad is reported briefly, and second hand, as it were. The narrator-monk hears it from Ḥākim, Baḥîrâ's disciple. And the author is content to report how in those *Qurʾān* passages and Islamic beliefs and practices which Christians find most objectionable, the refugee monk had misguidedly accomodated his instructions to the weaknesses of the Arabs – thereby not only explaining but dismissing them from serious religious consideration, as far as any Christian reader of the text would have been concerned. In this section the major points of dispute between Christians and Muslims are cleverly addressed in an artfully literary way. In the Arabic version of the story this section is expanded almost to vie with the apocalyptic portions of the text in literary importance. The author cites numerous quotations from the *Qurʾān* and then explains how Baḥîrâ had, misguidedly, it is implied, originally intended

32 Tartar, "Dialogue Islamo-Chrétien," vol. I., p. 107; vol. II., p. 112.

33 There has been no scholarly consensus on this point. L. Massignon thought the writer was a Jacobite. See L. Massignon, "al-Kindi," *EI*, 1st ed., vol. II (1927), p. 1080; Georg Graf insisted that he was a Nestorian. See Graf, *Geschichte*, vol. II, pp. 135-145. Armand Abel claimed that he was a Melkite. See A. Abel, "L'apologie d'al-Kindi et sa place dans la polemique islamo-chrétienne," in *L'Oriente cristiano nella storia della civiltà* (Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, Anno CCCLXI, Quaderno no. 62; Rome, 1964), pp. 501-523. Tartar would like to have al-Kindī be a non-denominational Christian. See Tartar, "Dialogue Islamo-Chrétien," vol. II., pp. XLI-XLIII.

34 J. Finkel (ed.), *Three Essays of Abu ʿOthman ʿAmr ibn Bahr al-Jahiz (d. 869)*, (Cairo, 1926), p. 14.

35 For rapid surveys see S.H. Griffith, "Disputes with Muslims in Syriac Christian Texts," and *idem*, "The Prophet Muhammad, his Scripture and his Message."

them to be interpreted in an acceptably Christian way. In the process, the author manages to cover all of the issues currently in dispute between Christians and Muslims in the early Islamic period.

In view of these considerations of the antecedent materials available to the composer of the Christian Baḥîrâ legend in the forms in which we actually have it: the Syriac apocalypses, the Islamic and Christian accounts of Muḥammad's encounters with monks, and the dispute texts of the early Islamic period, one returns to the question of authorship. Gero and others, as we have seen, have spoken of "layers" in the composition of the work, and of the earlier "independent existence" of the first part of the story. However this may be, and it is clearly not improbable that the account of Baḥîrâ's vision at Sinai may have once had an independent circulation, the fact remains that the whole work integrally is a literarily ingenious composition. In the forms in which it has survived, the Syriac version of the story seems to be the primary one; all of the constitutive features are present. In the Arabic version, the catechesis of Muḥammad is expanded and the whole work is tightened up in a stylistic way which bespeaks not only translation but re-authoring. Yet, *mutatis mutandis*, the story remains the same.

There are a number of items in the Arabic version which suggest its dependence on Syriac sources. Twice the author cites the authority of 'Methodius', in reference to the work which scholars now call the *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius*, an original composition in Syriac of the late seventh century.[36] He cites dates according to the years of Alexander,[37] a convention of the Syriac writers of the Syrian Orthodox community. And Syria (*bilād ash-Shām*), the homeland of the Syriac-speaking communities, is the geographical setting of the oppressive treatment of Christians at the hands of Muḥammad's Ishmaelite successors as it is described in the author's second apocalyptic section of the work. These considerations, plus the fact that the Arabic version follows the outline established in the Syriac version, argue in behalf of the priority of the Syriac.

The Arabic version, in its subtlety and literary ingenuity, is on the order of other Christian apologetical/polemical compositions of which one knows from the ninth or tenth centuries: the dialogue of the monk Abraham of Tiberias with the emir ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Hāshimī,[38] and the correspondence between al-Hāshimī and al-Kindī mentioned earlier. All three of these compositions have it

36 See Gottheil, 14 (1899), p. 262 (Arabic); 17 (1903), p. 132 (English) & 15 (1900), p. 71 (Arabic); 17 (1903), p. 146 (English). On Pseudo-Methodius see n. 19 above.

37 See, e.g., Gottheil 15 (1900), p. 91 (Arabic); 17 (1903), p. 153 (English).

38 See Giacinto Bulus Marcuzzo, *Le Dialogue d'Abraham de Tiberiade avec ʿAbd al-Rahman al-Hašimi à Jerusalem vers 820* (Rome, 1986). See also S.H. Griffith, "The Monk in the Emir's *Majlis*: the Apologetic Dialogue of Abraham of Tiberias; a Christian Arabic Text of the Early Abbasid Era," forthcoming publication.

in common that they are now virtually anonymous; they have their origins in the ninth century; they are artfully contrived in an ingeniously literary way; and they have all enjoyed a long and widely disseminated popularity in all the Christian communities of the Middle East, not least in more recent centuries. In this latter feature they have eclipsed the more scholarly and staid Christian apologies in Syriac and Arabic of the early Islamic period. Indeed, these three works are more rhetorically and more knowingly anti-Islamic in their polemics than most other apologetical/polemical texts. One might conclude that it is their very artfulness that has carried them forward.

As with all of these works, so with the Christian Baḥîrâ legend, to date them one must rely on internal criteria to suggest a plausible time for their composition. Here one has been speaking of ninth-century origins. The justification for this position is twofold: the descriptions of, or allusions to, persons and events in Islamic history one finds in the text; and the character of the apologetical/polemical arguments the author advances against Islam. In the former instance, the apocalyptic parts of the text yield the most helpful information. Armand Abel studied them from this point of view and came to the conclusion, which remains the most plausible one today, that the material reflects the state of affairs in the second half of the first Abbasid century, probably during the reign of al-Ma'mūn (813-833).[39] It is the burden of the second half of the present essay to study the overtly argumentative parts of the text more closely, especially the section of the story dealing with the catechesis of Muḥammad. Here too, as we shall see, it makes sense to think that the material has its origins in the ninth century, and that it is plausible to think of the mid-tenth century as the period when the full text will have come into its present form, particularly in the Arabic version. It remains true, however, that throughout the history of its transmission through the several Christian denominations in which it was read, editors and copyists have adapted the story to their own requirements. Only a true critical edition of the text will allow any more specific conclusions to be made.

There remains the question of the denomination in which the text was first composed. The role of the monk and his own ecclesiastical profile is the best indicator.[40] Here one consideration is primary: Baḥîrâ is a fugitive; he is *persona non grata* in his own community. What he has taught Muḥammad and what he provided in the *Qur'ān*, according to the story, independently of any alleged dis-

39 See A. Abel, "L'Apocalypse de Bahira et la notion islamique de Mahdi," *Annuaire de l'Institut de Philologie et d'Histoire Orientales* 3 (1953), pp. 1-12; *idem*, "Changements politiques et littérature eschatologique dans le monde musulman," *Studia Islamica* 2 (1954), pp. 23-43.

40 Gottheil mistakenly thought that the references to the 'Romans' in the apocalyptic portions of the legend referred to the Crusaders, rather than to the Byzantine rulers, and he therefore not only dated the text much later than current scholars do, but he supposed on this basis that the text came from a Chalcedonian Orthodox milieu. See Gottheil, "A Christian Bahira Legend," 13 (1898), p. 192.

tortions at the hands of Jews or others, is not acceptable to Christians. In spite of the monk's good intentions, what he taught Muḥammad is presented as both doctrinally and morally objectionable to Christians, as our review of this material will show. As for the monk's ecclesiastical profile, the author seems clearly to portray him as a refugee from the 'Nestorian' community. As Stephen Gero has noted, the reported episodes in Sargis-Baḥîrâ's life "are put into a church-historical context of unambiguously 'Nestorian', East Syrian character."[41] The ecclesiastical events and personages in his story all confirm this assessment. However, this fact does not mean that the work is simply a product of the 'Nestorian' community, as some scholars have assumed. Rather, the best assumption seems to be that the author has cast the story in a 'Nestorian' mode for polemical purposes. That is to say, the 'Nestorian' church, through one of its errant monks, is seen to be responsible for the rise of Islam. To a 'Melkite' or 'Jacobite' author and audience such an innuendo would be plausible, and, like the 'Arian' monk in the account of the "heresy of the Ishmaelites" attributed to John of Damascus, Sargis-Baḥîrâ's 'Nestorian' ecclesiastical identity would serve as a theological label as well as an historical claim about Islam. In fact it seems that the Syrian 'Jacobite' milieu was the more likely provenance of most of the apocalyptic sources from which the author of the Sargis-Baḥîrâ story drew his material. And in the longest text containing the Syriac version of Baḥîrâ's teaching, in contrast to the text which circulated in the 'Nestorian' community, the monk is made, uncharacteristically and inconsistently, explicitly to teach 'Jacobite' Orthodoxy.[42] So it is not improbable that the author was 'Jacobite'.

A peculiar twist in the Sargis-Baḥîrâ story is the nature of the monk's own reported misdemeanors. One will recall that he was passionately devoted to the idea that there should be only one cross in a church and that a wooden one. Accordingly, he did not shrink from vandalism in his enthusiasm to enforce his conviction. Stephen Gero has speculated in this connection "that the ninth century redactor of the Sergius-Baḥîrâ legend, for reasons of his own, attributed to his hero a view espoused and promulgated by the Byzantine iconoclasts."[43] Gero's observation that Sargis-Baḥîrâ's attitude toward the cross is compatible with that of the Byzantine iconoclasts is correct, and it must be put into context by calling to mind the additional fact that in Syria too in the eighth and early ninth centuries the cross and the icon were moments of conflict between Christians and Muslims. Furthermore, there is evidence that as a result of this conflict, there was also dissension within the Christian communities over the appropriate public veneration to be paid to cross and icon.[44] With this fact in mind, one may

41 Gero, "The Legend of the Monk Bahira," p. 55.
42 See below, n. 58.
43 Gero, "The Legend of the Monk Bahira," p. 56.
44 See Sidney H. Griffith, "Theodore Abû Qurrah's Arabic Tract on the Christian Practice of Venerating Images," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 105 (1985), pp. 53-73; *idem*, "Bashîr/Bêsêr: Boon Companion of the Byzantine Emperor Leo III: the Islamic Recension of his Story in Leiden Oriental MS 951 (2)," *Le Muséon* 103 (1990), pp. 289-323; *idem*, "Images, Islam and Christian Icons: a Moment in the Christian/Muslim Encounter in Early Islamic Times," in Canivet & Rey Coquais, *La Syrie de Byzance à l'Islam*, pp. 121-138. See also A. P. Kazhdan, "Kosmas of Jerusalem: 2. Can We Speak of his Political Views?" *Le Muséon* 103 (1990), pp. 329-346; Marie-France Auzépy, "De la Palestine à Constantinople (VIIIe – IXe siècles): Étienne le sabaïte et Jean Damascène," *Travaux et Mémoires* 12 (1994), pp. 183-218.

notice yet another instance in which Sargis-Baḥîrâ is at variance with the mainstream Christian communities over an issue that had arisen from the encounter with Islam. On this reading Sargis-Baḥîrâ could be seen portrayed as one of those 'hypocrites' (*munāfiqīn*) of whom a 'Melkite' writer complained in the second half of the ninth century that "they are the hypocrites among us, marked with our mark [i.e., the cross], standing in our congregations, contradicting our faith, forfeiters of themselves, who are Christians in name only."[45]

In the present state of research one must be content to say that the author of the Christian Baḥîrâ legend in its full Syriac form was a West Syrian, perhaps a 'Jacobite', but widely knowledgeable about ecclesiastical affairs generally in ninth century Syria. He drew on pre-existing materials in terms of the apocalyptic sources he used, and on the Islamic and Christian stories about the monk whom Muḥammad is said to have encountered; he highlighted doctrinal issues which were in dispute between Muslims and Christians in the ninth century. Subsequently, but perhaps still within the ninth century, or the first half of the tenth century, the story was re-told in Arabic, with a considerable enhancement of the section dealing with the catechesis of Muḥammad, in line with the heightened interest in debate and apologetic among Arabophone Christians in the early Islamic period. Throughout the work in both languages there is a perceptible interest on the author's part to suggest that Islam was inspired in its origins from within the 'Nestorian' community, albeit at the hands of a monk whom the 'Nestorians' themselves had repudiated. The work achieved a wide popularity in all the Christian denominations in the Middle East, surviving in a number of manuscripts which show how later copyists occasionally adjusted the details of the story, the better to make it accord with the copyist's own confessional requirements. It is particularly noticeable at the end of the Arabic version of the story, as we shall see, that presumably later hands have enhanced the monk's sense of contrition for the instructions he gave to Muḥammad, and have added

45 British Library Or. MS 4950, ff. 6r-6v. The remark comes from a work which the present writer calls the *Summa Theologiae Arabica*. See S. H. Griffith, "The First Christian *Summa Theologiae* in Arabic: Christian *Kalām* in Ninth-Century Palestine," in Michael Gervers & Ramzi Jibran Bikhazi (eds.), *Conversion and Continuity: Indigenous Christian Communities in Islamic Lands Eighth to Eighteenth Centuries* (Papers in Mediaeval Studies, 9; Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1990), pp. 15-31.

a number of lines in which he abjectly confesses his sinfulness – this in contradistinction to his earlier, more confident tones.

Up until now most scholarly commentary on the Christian Baḥîrâ legend has so much concentrated on its apocalyptic features that little sustained attention has been paid to its disputational sections, particularly in the Arabic version. It is to this study that the present inquiry now turns.

II. Disputational Design

The major polemical/apologetical claim of the Christian Baḥîrâ legend is, as the Syriac version puts it, the allegation that Baḥîrâ "had made disciples of the Sons of Ishmael and had become their chief, because he prophesied to them what they liked. He wrote and handed over to them the scripture which they call *Qur'ān*."[46] The author elaborates on this claim in the middle section of the work, in which the narrator-Monk tells the story of Sargis-Baḥîrâ's interviews with Muḥammad – the catechesis of Muḥammad in the narrative. The account is different in the Syriac and Arabic versions, and so one must review them separately.

A. *The Syriac Version*

According to the Syriac version, Ishô'yahb, the narrator, heard the account of Sargis-Baḥîrâ's interviews with Muḥammad, not from the monk himself, but only after his death from a disciple of Sargis-Baḥîrâ named Ḥâkim. From a narratological point of view, therefore, Ḥâkim is the reporter of the advice which Baḥîrâ is said to have given to Muḥammad. Given the tenor of this advice, it may be the case that from the point of view of the narrative, Ḥâkim is introduced precisely to put some distance between the narrator-monk and Sargis-Baḥîrâ in matters of which a well informed Christian could only disapprove. For although Sargis-Baḥîrâ is an errant, misguided monk, he is also presented as a holy man who works miracles. Even after his death, the text says that his bones miraculously aided in the identification of a murderer.[47] Ḥâkim is himself not a monk, but one who as a child had been cured of leprosy at Baḥîrâ's hands when he, at the monk's insistence, came to believe in the "Messiah, the son of the living God," the "Messiah God," as he testifies.[48]

Ḥâkim first tells what the reader recognizes as being essentially the Islamic Baḥîrâ story. He relates how the monk recognized Muḥammad's future prophethood when he came to the well by the hermitage in the company of a troop of Arabs. Baḥîrâ saw a vision above Muḥammad's head, "the likeness of a cloud," and he recognized it as a sign of prophecy.[49] He blessed Muḥammad and foretold the Arab conquest and the coming peace of Islam. It is at this juncture that the catechesis of Muḥammad takes place. It is in the guise of a dialogue between Muḥammad and Sargis, in the question and answer format: Muḥammad poses leading questions, which Baḥîrâ answers in a way which allows the reader to see both a statement of Christian doctrine, and, by implication, the normative Islamic position which it is meant to countervail.

In the first place Sargis explains that he has received his vision about Muḥammad and his future from Mt. Sinai, "the place where Moses received his divine visions."[50] And the monk specifies that Muḥammad's mission will be "to turn your people away from the worship of images to the worship of the one true God."[51] One recognizes in this purpose what Christian apologists writing in Syriac and Arabic in the early Islamic period were always prepared to concede to Muḥammad: he turned the Arabs away from idolatry to the worship of God.[52]

As to the identity of the one true God, the Monk testifies as follows:

> I worship the living God ... I profess and believe in his son Jesus the Messiah, and in the Holy Spirit.[53]

One notices immediately the locution, "his son Jesus the Messiah," a phrase which in Syriac echoes more the *Qur'ān*'s "*al-masīḥ 'Isā ibn Maryam*" (e.g., in *an-Nisā'*, IV: 157, 171) than it does current Christian usage. In Syriac, Christians customarily spoke simply of "our Lord Jesus" (*mâran Ishū'*).

In answer to the question about how one comes to know about such a God, Baḥîrâ replies, "from the Law and the Prophets."[54] This was the answer of all the Christian controversialists in the early Islamic period; many of them developed elaborate apologies for Christianity based on testimonies drawn from the Law and the prophets.[55] This strategy drew its strength from the *Qur'ān*'s own prophetology, in which Muḥammad's mission is presented as continuous with that of Abraham, Moses and the rest of the prophets. Christians argued that prophecy was truly fulfilled only in the life and ministry of the Lord Jesus.

46 Gottheil, 13 (1898), p.212 (Syriac); 14 (1899), pp.213-214 (English).
47 See Gottheil, 14 (1899), p.214.
48 Gottheil, 13 (1898), p.214 (Syriac); 14 (1899), pp.215-216 (English).

49 Gottheil, 13 (1898), p.216 (Syriac); 14 (1899), p.216 (English). The Islamic version of the story mentions a mark on Muhammad's body, not a cloud hovering over his head.
50 Gottheil, 13 (1898), p.217 (Syriac); 14 (1899), p.217 (English).
51 Gottheil, 13 (1898), pp.217-218 (Syriac); 14 (1899), pp.217-218 (English).
52 See, e.g., the dialogue of the monk of Bêt Ḥâlê with a Muslim notable in Diyarbakir MS 95, f. 9, where the author characterizes Muḥammad's teaching of monotheism as "the doctrine he had received from Sargis-Baḥîrâ." See also Marcuzzo, *Le Dialogue d'Abraham de Tiberiade*, p.321.
53 Gottheil, 13 (1898), p.218 (Syriac); 14 (1899), p.218 (English).
54 Gottheil, 13 (1898), p.218 (Syriac); 14 (1899), p.218 (English).
55 See, e.g., Theodore Abû Qurrah's tract on the Law of Moses and the prophets who prophesied

As one would expect, a major portion of the exchange is concerned with Christology. The monk confesses, "I am a Christian (*kristyânâ*)." In answer to Muḥammad's question, "What is Christianity (*kristyânûtâ*)?" the monk answers that "it is being anointed" (*mshîḥûtâ*). When Muḥammad asks "what is being anointed?" the monk answers with a quotation from the *Qur'ān*. He says,

> The Messiah is the Word of God and his Spirit. The Ishmaelites too acknowledge the Messiah, that he is the Word of God and his Spirit.[56]

One readily recognizes here the quotation from *an-Nisā'*, IV:171, as well as the attempt to elucidate the sense of the term 'Messiah' by reference to the root meaning of the verb *masaḥa*, 'to anoint'. Then, in answer to Muḥammad's question, "Is the Messiah God, prophet, or man?" Baḥîrâ replies that "the Word of God the Father was sent by God, and came down and dwelt in the womb of the holy virgin Mary. She became pregnant and gave birth without copulation."[57] When Muḥammad wanted to know, "how could a virgin get pregnant without copulation?" the monk gives the answer that "the Word of God came down from heaven and was clothed with a body from the virgin. The Messiah was born from her in a bodily way, although he was God in terms of person and nature."[58] The 'Jacobite'/Monophysite character of this statement is very clear, insisting as it clearly does that the Messiah is God in both 'person' or 'hypostasis', and 'nature', the very terms of the Christological controversy. It is significant that in the form of the story which circulated in the 'Nestorian' community, the corresponding passage states only that the virgin "gave birth to a son without copulation and God became man."[59] The Christological section of the dialogue then concludes with a brief exchange about the crucifixion of Jesus. The monk teaches, in direct contradiction to the *Qur'ān* (see *an-Nisā'*, IV: 157) that "the Jews crucified him" and he answers Muḥammad's question about why he would worship (*sāged*) someone whom the Jews crucified, as follows:

> I worship the man in whom [God] worked wonders, and many signs on the earth, whom he took up with him to heaven (cf. *an-Nisā'*, IV:158), and in whom he will come to bring about the resurrection of the just and the wicked.[60]

about Christ, and the Gospel in C. Bacha (ed.), *Un traité des oeuvres arabes de Théodore Abou-Kurra* (Tripoli de Syrie & Rome, 1905).

56 Gottheil, 13 (1898), p. 219 (Syriac); 14 (1899), p. 218 (English). In the Syriac text circulated in the 'Nestorian' community the monk's reply is different. He says, "Christianity is the confession the Messiah taught us." In answer to the question, "Who is the Messiah?," Sargis says, "The Messiah is the Word of God and his Spirit." Gottheil, 13 (1898), p. 219 (Syriac); 14 (1899), p. 239.

57 Gottheil, 13 (1898), p. 220 (Syriac); 14 (1899), p. 219 (English).

58 Gottheil, 13 (1898), p. 220 (Syriac); 14 (1899), p. 219 (English). The translation given here differs from the one given by Gottheil, who seems to have missed the Christological significance of the terms.

59 Gottheil, 13 (1898), p. 220(Syriac); 14 (1899), p. 240 (English).

60 Gottheil, 13 (1898), p. 221 (Syriac); 14 (1899), p. 219 (English).

Next the monk beseeches Muḥammad in behalf of the Christians (*kristyânê*) "who are 'Messiahites' (*mshîḥāyyê*)," as the text calls them,[61] because there are among them monks, priests and deacons who are humble, God-fearing, celibate, poor, and who live in monasteries, cloisters and hermitages. This intervention echoes a positive sentiment in regard to monks and solitaries which one does in fact find in some early Islamic sources,[62] and which is also evoked in Christian dispute texts in Syriac and Arabic.[63] No Christian reader of the Baḥîrâ legend could miss its appeal.

The latter part of the Syriac account of the monk's interview with Muḥammad consists of a report of the strategies which the two of them are said to have devised to facilitate the Arabs' acceptance of Baḥîrâ's religious teaching. Since Muḥammad was worried that his people would not accept him, "because I do not read scripture and I do not know anything,"[64] the monk proposed to teach him by night what he would preach by day. Muḥammad would then claim that the angel Gabriel had given him instructions. As for the heavenly reward which would await the believers in his message, Baḥîrâ provides Muḥammad with a description of paradise which echoes that of the *Qur'ān*. When Muḥammad says that Arabs cannot go without sex, the monk tells him to say that "in the garden there are girls with large eyes, fat and beautiful to look at, seven of whom will be given to each man."[65] Christian apologists and polemicists in the early Islamic period seldom failed to highlight such Islamic pictures of paradise as this one, to suggest that it is morally deficient.[66] As for other religious observances and practices, the monk counsels Muḥammad to enjoin his followers to fast only during day-light hours for thirty days, if they cannot bear more intense fasts. He counsels prayer seven times a day, "five times during the day-time and twice at

61 Gottheil, 13 (1898), p. 222 (Syriac); 14 (1899), p. 219 (English). The Syriac text which circulated among the 'Nestorians' explains the Greek term 'Christian' by the phrase "clothed in the Messiah." Gottheil, 13 (1898), p. 222 (Syriac); 14 (1899), p. 240, a phrase which Gottheil renders "imitators of the Messiah," thereby missing the rich sense of the clothing metaphor in Syriac.

62 One finds such a sentiment in commentaries on such passages in the *Qur'ān* as *al-Mā'idah*, V:82 and *al-Ḥadīd*, LV:27. See Jane Dammen McAuliffe, *Qur'anic Christians; an Analysis of Classical and Modern Exegesis* (Cambridge, 1991), pp. 220-233, 263-284.

63 See, e.g., the debate of the monk of Bêt Ḥālê with a Muslim notable, Diyarbakir MS 95, f. 15.

64 Gottheil, 13 (1898), p. 223 (Syriac); 14 (1899), p. 220 (English). One thinks in this connection of the *Qur'ān*'s description of Muḥammad as *nabī 'ummī*. See *al-A'rāf*, VII:157 & 158.

65 Gottheil, 13 (1898), p. 225 (Syriac); 14 (1899), p. 221 (English). The description echoes such passages from the *Qur'ān* as *ad-Duḥān*, XLIV:54, *at-Tūr*, LII:20, and *al-Wāqi'ah*, LVI:22.

66 See S. H. Griffith, "Comparative Religion in the Apologetics of the First Christian Arabic Theologians," *Proceedings of the PMR Conference: Annual Publication of the Patristic, Mediaeval and Renaissance Conference* 4 (1979), pp. 63-87.

night."[67] And he appoints Friday as the day for a communal assembly for prayer, "for on it you received divine laws and statutes."[68]

As a warrant for these measures Baḥîrâ is said to have written a scripture (i.e., the *Qur'ān*) for Muḥammad to set before his people. He tells the future prophet:

> I shall write a book for you and I shall teach you. On a Friday I will put it on the horn of a cow. You go and assemble the people in one place. Take a seat among them and say, today the Lord will send you from heaven a great book, laws and statutes, by which you are to be guided all your life. When you see a cow coming, rise from your seat, go towards it, and take the book from its horn in the sight of all your people. Then say to them, this book has come down from heaven, from God. The earth was not worthy enough to receive it; so this cow received it on its horn. From that day on the book was called, *sūrat al-Baqarah*.[69]

One could hardly miss the polemical intent of this passage. It was a ploy that had appeared in earlier Christian texts in the early Islamic period, so to indict parts of the *Qur'ān*. One finds it in the Greek account of the rise of Islam attributed to John of Damascus, and in the Syriac account of the debate of the monk of Bêt Ḥālê with a Muslim notable.[70] Some modern scholars have seen in these mentions of the names of individual *sūrāt* evidence for the gradual growth of the *Qur'ān* to the form in which we presently have it.[71]

Islam, of course, did not profess the doctrines which the Christian legend says that Baḥîrâ taught Muḥammad. To explain this fact the Syriac version of the story says that after Baḥîrâ's death a Jewish scribe, variously called 'Kaleb,' 'Ka'af', or 'Ka'b' in the manuscripts, came to prominence among the Arabs, and "corrupted what Sargis had written and taught."[72] It was 'Kaleb', according to the story, who suggested to the Arabs that the 'Paraclete' whom, according to the Gospel, Jesus would send after his ascension to heaven (see John 15:26), would be Muḥammad. But 'Kaleb' fell into disgrace when his prophecy about Muḥammad's resurrection from the dead failed to come true. Nevertheless, the text says:

> Because of their ignorance, the people discarded the words of Rabban Sargis-Baḥîrâ, which were the truth, and received and accepted this tradition (*mashlmānûtâ / shalmûtâ*) which Kaleb the scribe had given them; even to this day they say that the Paraclete is Muḥammad.[73]

67 Gottheil, 13 (1898), p. 226 (Syriac); 14 (1899), p. 222 (English). Presumably, in the Syriac author's mind the reduction of the number of times of prayer from the Christian seven times a day to the Islamic five is a result of the alteration of the *Qur'ān* at a later time.
68 Gottheil, 13 (1898), pp, 226-227 (Syriac); 14 (1899), p. 222 (English).
69 Gottheil, 13 (1898), pp. 227-228 (Syriac); 14 (1899), p. 222 (English).
70 See Sahas, *John of Damascus on Islam*, pp. 89-94, 137-141; Diyarbakir MS 95, f. 11.
71 See P. Crone & M. Cook, *Hagarism; the Making of the Islamic World* (Cambridge, 1977), p. 17.
72 Gottheil, 13 (1898), p. 213 (Syriac); 14 (1899), 214 (English).
73 Gottheil, 13 (1898), pp. 213-214 (Syriac); 14 (1899), p. 215 (English).

'Kaleb' here is no doubt a reference to Ka'b al-Aḥbār, the early Jewish convert to Islam, to whom a number of early Islamic traditions are traced.[74] His appearance in the Baḥîrâ story is in service of the *adversus Judaeos* strain in Christian apologetics/polemics in the early Islamic period. In this literature there was a considerable effort to portray Islam as a species of Judaism, which the writers would then describe in the most disdainful tones.[75]

In the Syriac version of the Baḥîrâ story, the catechesis of Muḥammad is clearly a literary attempt, knowingly to depict Islam as a degraded and simplified form of Christianity, which was further distorted by Jews. It fairly well reflects in its fictional form many of the features of the more formally conceived Christian apologies in the Islamic milieu. And even its fictional motifs are well selected items from the lore of the Muslims, including the *Qur'ān* and the *ḥadīth*, which the composer of the story has woven into a narrative which is both apocalyptic and historical in its claims.

B. *The Arabic Version*

The Arabic version of the catechesis of Muḥammad is longer than this feature of the story is in the Syriac version. It is better integrated into the narrative as a whole, and it is of a different character. In Arabic the narrator-monk tells the story in the first person, reporting Baḥîrâ's account of his meeting with Muḥammad. He had previously told of his location among the Ishmaelites near a well, and how he had begun "to tell them the story of their father Ishmael, and the promise of God to Abraham in regard to him."[76] The allusion to God's scriptural promise regarding Ishmael (cf. Gen. 21: 13 & 18) attracts the reader's attention because one knows of only one other reference to this promise in Christian controversial texts of the early Islamic period, in the dialogue of the monk Abraham of Tiberias with a Muslim emir.[77]

The catechesis of Muḥammad begins with the story of the meeting of Baḥîrâ and Muḥammad at the former's well, where the monk recognizes the future prophet straightaway among some approaching Arabs by his bearing and his de-

74 On Ka'b see M. Schmitz, "Ka'b al-Aḥbār," *EI*, new ed., vol. IV (1978), pp. 316-317; M. Perlmann, "A Legendary Story of Ka'b al-Aḥbar's Conversion to Islam," *Joshua Starr Memorial Volume* (New York, 1953), pp. 85-99; *idem*, "Another Ka'b al-Aḥbar Story," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 14 (1954), pp. 48-58. For further bibliography see Gordon D. Newby, *A History of the Jews of Arabia; from Ancient Times to their Eclipse under Islam* (Columbia, S.C., 1988), p. 141, n. 41.
75 See S.H. Griffith, "Jews and Muslims in Christian Syriac and Arabic Texts of the Ninth Century," *Jewish History* 3 (1988), pp. 65-94.
76 Gottheil, 14 (1899), p. 261 (Arabic); 17 (1903), p. 131 (English).
77 See Marcuzzo, *Le Dialogue d'Abraham de Tiberiade*, p. 321.

meanor among his fellows. Three days after the first encounter, according to the story, Muḥammad returned alone to visit the monk, who reports that "he asked me questions and listened wonderingly."[78]

At the very start of the catechesis the monk assures Muḥammad, "You will remove the people of your house and all your countrymen from worshipping idols, and you will bring them to the worship of God the exalted one, the only one (*Allāhu taʿālā waḥdahu*)".[79] The reader recognizes immediately the *Qurʾān*'s diction in this statement (e.g., in *al-Aʿrāf*, VII: 70, 90); it marks what will be the writer's style throughout the narrative – he evokes the *Qurʾān* in allusions and quotations at every opportunity. In the present statement he makes a claim about Muḥammad which often appears in Christian texts of the early Islamic period: while not a prophet in Christian eyes, he nevertheless saved his people from idolatry.[80]

Baḥîrâ's first instructions to Muḥammad took the form of a brief statement of the doctrines of the Trinity and the Incarnation, which are presented as fulfilling the preaching of the ancient prophets. The monk proposed that Muḥammad too was going "to certify the coming of the Messiah, his miraculous signs, his resurrection, and his ascent into heaven."[81] What is more, at the outset Baḥîrâ sounds the *Adversus Judaeos* theme. He says that Muḥammad's testimony to Christ, "will be received as true by the nations and the tribes, with the exception of the cursed Jews. For they wrongly say, 'the Messiah has not yet come; the one who did come with innovation, him we have crucified, killed and destroyed.' But they are wrong about this. In their craftiness they have become hostile towards all peoples."[82] Here one recognizes the language of the *Qurʾān* about the alleged Jewish claim to have killed and crucified "the Messiah, Jesus, Mary's son" (*an-Nisāʾ*, IV: 157). And it is clear that the author is notifying the reader in advance that in his opinion Jewish hostility will account for the deformation of Christian doctrines at the hands of the Muslims, a not uncommon claim in Christian dispute texts of the early Islamic period.[83] As for Muḥammad, when he expresses the desire to learn more, the monk first extracts from him the pledge not to levy taxes on monks in the future, nor to engage in hostilities against Christians and their churches. He promises to teach Muḥammad by night what he should say to his followers by day, claiming the authority of the angel Gabriel. Then he pledges to equip Muḥammad with all the knowledge he will require, from scrip-

78 Gottheil, 14 (1899), p. 264 (Arabic); 17 (1903), p. 133 (English).
79 Gottheil, 14 (1899), p. 265 (Arabic); 17 (1903), p. 134 (English)
80 See, e.g., the remarks of Patriarch Timothy I in H. Putman, *L'église et l'islam sous Timothée I* (Beyrouth, 1975), pp. 31-33 (Arabic).
81 Gottheil, 14 (1899), p. 267 (Arabic); 17 (1903), p. 135 (English).
82 Gottheil, 14 (1899), p. 267 (Arabic); 17 (1903), p. 135 (English).
83 See Griffith, "Jews and Muslims in Texts of the Ninth Century."

ture and from reason, to deal with any 'question' (*masʾalah*) anyone will pose to him.[84] This too is the language of the dispute texts of the early Abbasid period.[85]

The main body of the catechesis of Muḥammad in the Arabic version of the Christian Baḥîrâ legend consists of the quotation in succession of passages from the *Qurʾān* which the monk says, "I wrote", together with an explanation of their Christian interpretation. This is said to have been in response to Muḥammad's request to the monk to "set out to write down for me something I might say and learn."[86] The passages quoted or alluded to raise most of the issues of doctrine and practice which were the subjects of controversy between Muslims and Christians at the time. Here we may review only some of the more interesting ones.

The monk alleges that the *basmalah* indicates the Trinity; the night of *al-Qadr* (XCVII), he says, describes the night of Christ's birth in Bethlehem. The *ṣibghat Allāh* ('God's dye' or 'color') mentioned in *al-Baqarah*, II:138 refers to Christ's baptism by John the Baptist.[87] The famous passage which denies that the Jews killed or crucified Christ (*an-Nisāʾ*, IV:157) means "that the Messiah did not die in his divine being (*jawhar*), but he died only in his human being (*jawhar*)."[88] The admonition to call in witnesses for a commercial transaction in *al-Baqarah*, II:182 is taken to refer to the testimony of the Father and the Holy Spirit in behalf of the Son at Christ's baptism (Mk. 1:11). John the Baptist and all the people present heard it, the text says, as "a testimony of the two hypostases (*al-uqnūmayn*) to the [one] hypostasis (*al-uqnūm*), in the harmony of the unity of the being (*jawhar*), one eternal God, living, speaking."[89] Of the famous *crux interpretum* in *al-Māʾidah*, V:64: "The Jews say 'God's hand is bound.' But their hand is bound and they are cursed in what they say," the monk says that the passage refers to what the Jews are on record in the Gospel as saying in mockery to Christ on the cross (Mt. 27: 40-43).

The text refutes the Islamic charge that Christians have changed and altered the scriptures by having the monk claim that he wrote *Yūnus*, X:94, "If you are in doubt . . . ask those to whom the scripture was given before you"[90] to prove that the Gospel of all the scriptures has not been affected by any deficiency, alteration or corruption. He implicitly explains the *Qurʾān*'s term for 'Christi-

84 See Gottheil, 15 (1900), pp. 57-58 (Arabic); 17 (1903), p. 137.
85 See this issue discussed in S. H. Griffith, "Faith and Reason in Christian *Kalām*: Theodore Abū Qurrah on Discerning the True Religion," in Samir K. Samir & Jørgen S. Nielsen, *Christian Arabic Apologetics during the Abbasid Period (750-1258)* (Leiden, 1994), pp. 1-43.
86 Gottheil, 15 (1900), p. 58 (Arabic); 17 (1903), p. 137 (English).
87 Christian writers use the root *ṣ-b-gh* to mean 'to baptize'. See G. Graf, *Verzeichnis arabischer kirchlicher Termini* (CSCO, vol. 147; Louvain, 1954), p. 70.
88 Gottheil, 15 (1900), p. 61 (Arabic); 17 (1903), p. 138 (English).
89 Gottheil, 15 (1900), p. 62 (Arabic); 17 (1903), p. 140 (English).
90 The *Qurʾān*'s text actually has "those who read the scripture before you."

ans,' i.e., *an-naṣārā*, by reference to the phrases *anṣār Allāh* and *anṣārī ilā Allāh* used in reference to Christ's apostles (*ḥawāriyyīn*) in *aṣ-Ṣaff*, LXI:14.[91] And he says that the apostles were called God's *anṣār* (helpers) because of the confession of Christ's divinity attributed to Peter in Mt. 16:16, "You are the Messiah, the son of the living God." The monk ended his first account of how he had tried to express Christian doctrines in the *Qur'ān* with the following allegation:

> Many other things I wrote for him, too numerous to mention, by which I sought to turn him to a belief in the truth and a recognition of the coming of the Messiah into the world, and the condemnation of the Jews in regard to that which they say of our Lord, the true Messiah.[92]

The discussion between Muḥammad and the monk turns next to the religious practices to be inculcated among the Arabs. Baḥîrâ counsels prayer and fasting. He describes what the reader recognizes as the typical Islamic ritual for the Friday prayers: the worshippers lined up in ranks behind the *imām* who sets the pattern for the three *rak'āt* and the accompanying recitations, which the monk says he intended as testimonies to the Trinity. Similarly with the regular ablutions before prayer, the monk explains that the washings of face, hands and feet are meant to be a similitude for the Trinity. Initially Baḥîrâ counselled prayer seven times a day, with the *qiblah* eastward,[93] toward the rising of the sun, with the times for prayer marked by the sound of the bell. But Muḥammad's followers resisted these innovations, so the monk told Muḥammad to say, "God gave me orders that you should pray toward Mecca."[94]

At this point in the narrative, as Muḥammad demands special concessions for the Arabs in religious practice, Baḥîrâ becomes defensive in his confession to the monk-narrator. He explains that in accordance with his vision at Sinai, and with what he had learned from Methodius about the coming rule of the Ishmaelites,[95] Baḥîrâ was determined to teach Muḥammad the truth about the Messiah. But, he says of Muḥammad, "his understanding could not encompass it, and the faith of Arius ... became fixed in his thinking, who had said, 'I believe that the Messiah is the Word of God and the son of God, but he was created, ... limited'."[96] It is at this juncture that the monk admits his responsibility for the *Qur'ān*'s descriptions of the garden of paradise, and of the pleasures which there await the believers – including the beautiful *Houris*, which all the Christian polemicists of the day were in the habit of ridiculing. The monk goes on to take the credit for having taught Muḥammad the first phrase of the *shahādah*. And he taught him to say to people:

> You should become Muslims. God said to me, "I want Islam to be your religion." I meant by this name the 'Muslim' of the Messiah.[97]

Then the monk takes credit for directing Muḥammad to forbid celibacy, and the consumption of blood or pork among his followers. He appoints Friday as their day of assembly because, he says, Adam was created on a Friday, at the time of the mid-day prayers.[98] And the monk admits his responsibility for the second phrase of the *shahādah*. He says, "I wrote, 'Muḥammad is God's messenger' (*rasūl Allāh*)."[99] And he includes a number of passages from the *Qur'ān* which refer to Muḥammad's mission. It is at this point that the monk admits that he knew that after his time others would come to the fore to "change the greater part of what I wrote for him."[100] Nevertheless, he continues to cite what he wrote in the *Qur'ān*, and to explain how he intended the passages to affirm both the Trinity and the Unity of God. For example, the plural verb and the singular noun (your Lord) in the phrase, "we have given you abundance, so pray to your Lord" (*al-Kawthar*, CVIII:1-2) means the affirmation of three *aqānīm* (hypostases) but one Lordship (*rubūbiyyah*).[101] Similarly, "Do not dispute with the scripture, except for what is better" (*al-'Ankabūt*, XXIX:46) means "do not address the Gospel people, except courteously."[102] "To say, 'We have become Muslims'," the monk tells Muḥammad, means that "the true faith is faith in the Messiah and Islam is the submission (*islām*) of the Messiah's disciple."[103]

As in the Syriac version, so in the Arabic one, the monk devises the ruse of sending the scripture he wrote for Muḥammad into the assembly of his followers on the horn of a cow to dramatize the allegation that it was not composed by man but was supposed to have come down from God in heaven. Muḥammad is said to have called the scripture *Furqān* "because it was scatter-shot (*mufarraq*); it was assembled from many scriptures."[104] One could hardly miss here

91 See the same evocation in Marcuzzo, *Le Dialogue d'Abraham de Tiberiade*, p. 396.
92 Gottheil, 15 (1900), p. 64 (Arabic); 17 (1903), p. 141 (English).
93 This was, of course, the Christian *qiblah*.
94 Gottheil, 15 (1900), p. 69 (Arabic); 17 (1903), p. 145 (English).
95 The reference is to Methodius of Patara, the pseudepigraphic author of the *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius*, the principal source for the apocalyptic sections in the legend of Baḥîrâ. The author of the Arabic version refers to Methodius twice. See Gottheil, 14 (1899), p. 261 (Arabic); 17 (1903), p. 132 (English) and 15 (1900), p. 71 (Arabic); 17 (1903), p. 146 (English).
96 Gottheil, 15 (1900), p. 72 (Arabic); 17 (1903), p. 146 (English). John of Damascus was, as mentioned above, the first Christian writer to identify the monk whom Muḥammad met as an Arian. See n. 24 above.

97 Gottheil, 15 (1900), p. 74 (Arabic); 17 (1903), p. 148 (English). Here, as in a number of instances, the English translation given in the present essay is different from Gottheil's.
98 For the time of Adam's creation in Jewish lore see Louis Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews* (7 vols.; Philadelphia, 1918-1938), vol. I, p. 82.
99 Gottheil, 15 (1900), p. 76 (Arabic); 17 (1903), p. 149 (English).
100 Gottheil, 15 (1900), p. 76 (Arabic); 17 (1903), p. 150 (English).
101 See Gottheil, 15 (1900), p. 77 (Arabic); 17 (1903), p. 150 (English).
102 Gottheil, 15 (1900), p. 78 (Arabic); 17 (1903), p. 151 (English).
103 Gottheil, 15 (1900), p. 79 (Arabic); 17 (1903), p. 152 (English).
104 Gottheil, 15 (1900), p. 80 (Arabic); 17 (1903), p. 153 (English).

one of the *Qur'ān*'s own names for itself and previous revelations, (i.e., *al-Furqān* in, e.g., *al-Baqarah*, II:53 & 185; *Al-'Imrān*, III:4), polemically used to signify the *Qur'ān*'s disparate and derivative character.

At the end of the Arabic version of the Baḥîrâ legend, after the second apocalyptic section, the narrator-monk recounts Baḥîrâ's own apology for what he had done, with an emphasis on his guilty conscience for having composed the *Qur'ān*. He confesses:

> I know that I have brought a grievous sin upon myself by reason of what I have done – especially for what this book contains. I know that it will, someday, fall into the hands of some of the Christians. They will blame me for what I have done to them: for I know that I have strengthened the power of the enemy over them.[105]

Although Baḥîrâ agrees that "the sons of Ishmael . . . are the very worst of men,"[106] he nevertheless explains that in what he did for them he was motivated by God's promise to Abraham about Ishmael. He says,

> I wanted to confirm the dominion of the sons of Ishmael so that God's promise to Abraham about Ishmael might be fulfilled.[107]

Furthermore, Baḥîrâ says that he sponsored Muḥammad's mission, and composed the *Qur'ān*, "so that our Lord the Messiah's saying in the Gospel might be fulfilled, 'False prophets will surely come to you after I am gone. Woe to him who follows them' (cf. Mt. 24:11)."[108] Nevertheless, Baḥîrâ insists,

> I made the better part of this scripture a recollection of the divinity and the humanity [of Christ], of the pure mother of light[109], and of all the miracles he worked among the sons of Israel. I confirmed the curse upon the sons of Israel and I commended the Christians (*an-naṣārā*) to him (i.e., to Muḥammad).[110]

Still, the author of the Arabic version has a hard time bringing his work to a close. He goes on to cite other passages from the *Qur'ān*, together with the interpretations he had in mind when he composed them for Muḥammad. Due to the lack of a truly critical edition of the text, however, as well as its inherent obscurities, a number of the passages are difficult fully to understand. He goes on too, to speak of the great sin he has committed. In this connection he mentions the moral laxities he permitted Muḥammad. He mentions that in the book he

105 Gottheil, 15 (1900), pp. 89-90 (Arabic); 17 (1903), p. 158 (English).
106 Gottheil, 15 (1900), p. 91 (Arabic); 17 (1903), p. 159 (English).
107 Gottheil, 15 (1900), p. 91 (Arabic); 17 (1903), p. 159 (English).
108 Gottheil, 15 (1900), p. 92 (Arabic); 17 (1903), p. 160 (English).
109 By this expression the author means the Virgin Mary. Throughout the text he has cited a number of passages from the *Qur'ān* referring to Mary, the authorship of which he claims for himself.
110 Gottheil, 15 (1900), p. 92 (Arabic); 17 (1903), p. 160 (English).

had allowed up to ten wives, and he does not forget to bring up the affair of Muḥammad's marriage to Zayd's wife.[111] Finally, Baḥîrâ claims that "in the greater part of what I wrote for him, one part contradicted the other, one verse abrogated another."[112] He even claims credit for the mysterious letters which appear at the head of some *sūrāt*; he says they are the names he gave them. He cites *al-Baqarah*, II:2, "This is the book in which, without doubt, there is guidance for the pious." And he says, "I meant only the holy Gospel in this statement, and that its adherents are the pious ones."[113]

There are many difficult and obscure passages in the Arabic version of the Baḥîrâ story. The text is sorely in need of a new and more critical edition. Even the quotations from the *Qur'ān* have many variations from the received text. But enough has been said here to convey a fair sense of the gist and the ingenuity of the work. More than once the reader has had the sense that the text has grown over the years of its transmission, as later scribes have added more material. But in the present state of research it is difficult to separate the "original" from the "accretions". Suffice it for now to take notice of the ambiguity of Baḥîrâ's career as the Christian writer presents it. He has at once portrayed a sympathetic character who has lost no opportunity to insinuate Christian truth into the *Qur'ān*, and a heretical monk who has in the end done great damage to the Christian community.

III. Christian Apologetics in the World of Islam

In comparison with the other apologetical/polemical texts written by Christians in the early Islamic period, the Baḥîrâ legend is unique; it combines both apocalypse and disputation. The disputation is embedded in the dialogue between Muḥammad and Baḥîrâ. This feature of the legend is much more evident in the Arabic version, where the dialogue has become as important a part of the narrative as the apocalyptic sections of the story are in both the Syriac and the Arabic versions. For the apocalyptic material the author is heavily dependent on the *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius* and works like it from the late seventh and early eighth centuries.[114] He displays his ingenuity and his literary originality by construing this material together with the Islamic story of Muḥammad's meeting with Baḥîrâ, which by the second half of the eighth century had already become a feature in nascent Islam's apologetic stance in the "sectarian mi-

111 Actually the *Qur'ān* allows only four wives (*an-Nisā'*, IV:3).
112 Gottheil, 15 (1900), pp. 99-100 (Arabic); 17 (1903), pp. 164-165 (English).
113 Gottheil, 15 (1900), p. 100 (Arabic); 17 (1903), p. 165 (English).
114 See the references in n. 19 above.

lieu".[115] In the Christian context there was already a disposition to see in the teachings of Islam evidence of Muḥammad's having had contact with a heretical monk, as in the famous passage from the *De heresibus* of John of Damascus.[116] But one is inclined to take this as an expression of a theological judgment about Islamic teaching, rather than as a statement of how historically Muḥammad came by his distinctive doctrine. Among Christians, the theological label 'Arian', or 'Nestorian' in some circles, would already effectively classify Islam. In the Islamic story the monk, who already has a name, serves as a representative of one community from among the 'Scripture People' who in the newly minted Islamic 'salvation history' testifies to Muḥammad's prophethood. What both the Christian and the Islamic stories share is the assumption that early in his career Muḥammad was in colloquy with at least one monk. The same kind of story serves the apologetical/polemical purposes of both communities, albeit from different perspectives. The Christian writer of the Baḥîrâ legend, therefore, attempts to seize a dialectical advantage when in the ninth century he construes the apocalyptic material about the rise of Islam, which had already become traditional in his community, together with the outline of the Islamic Baḥîrâ story, and folds the whole narrative, again not without apologetical/polemical intent, into a framework story which situates the action in the 'Nestorian' community. The message is that the 'Nestorians' are in some measure responsible for Islam, at least theologically, through the machinations of the errant monk Baḥîrâ, a fugitive from within their ranks.

In the Islamic Baḥîrâ story there was already a scene in which the monk plies Muḥammad with questions. The writer of the Christian legend used this feature of the story as the setting for a dialogue between the two characters after the manner of an interview between a master and his disciple. It gave him the opportunity to argue that Islam is simply misunderstood Christian heresy, which has subsequently been distorted at the hands of Jewish scribes. And he hit on the polemically effective idea of alleging that the monk, misguidedly as it turned out, had originally taught Muḥammad the text of the *Qur'ān*, together with Christian interpretations of it, which upheld the Christian side of all the major points of dispute between Christians and Muslims, both doctrinal and practical. In the Syriac version of the story, this feature is less well developed, and it is short by comparison with the apocalyptic material, which is of much greater interest to the writer. But in the Arabic version it has been expanded to become a major component of the composition. In Arabic there is not just the claim that Baḥîrâ taught Muḥammad what one might call a Christian *Qur'ān*, but there are numer-

115 Here one presumes the basic accuracy of the views expressed in Wansbrough, *The Sectarian Milieu*.

116 See Sahas, *John of Damascus on Islam*, p. 132.

ous quotations from the actual *Qur'ān*, for which the writer provides what he presents as the monk's original interpretations. All of the major topics of debate between Christians and Muslims come up in the course of the narrative, not just doctrinal ones, but practical ones as well, such as the *qiblah*, the direction the worshipper should face when he prays. In this way the Baḥîrâ story becomes a vehicle for a Christian presentation of all the issues about which the disputants of the two communities were arguing at the time of the composition of the work. And it is certainly the first Christian commentary on selected verses from the *Qur'ān*, if one may so call it.

In terms of its place in the Christian literature of the Muslim/Christian dialogue in the early Islamic period, the Baḥîrâ legend goes together with those other anonymous pieces such as the al-Hāshimī/al-Kindī correspondence, and the literary dialogues, such as the one between Abraham of Tiberias and the emir in Jerusalem,[117] to form a body of imaginative compositions which allow their Christian readers not only to fend off the challenge of Islam, but to reinforce in themselves the sense of being in the right. They have defended their faith in the very idiom, and indeed, in the instance of the Baḥîrâ legend, in terms of the very traditions which in Islamic lore, to the contrary, suggest the Christian commendation of Islam.

The Baḥîrâ legend, or portions of it, were translated into Latin, as we have seen, and into Armenian.[118] Like the other exercises in what one might call imaginative apologetics/polemics, the Baḥîrâ legend had a wide circulation in the Christian communities in the Middle East, in both its Syriac and its Arabic versions. As for its value as a historical document, it is of interest chiefly for the light it sheds on the growth and development of Christian controversial literature, beginning in the first Abbasid century. It clearly presumes the prior circulation of the Islamic Baḥîrâ story for its effectiveness. Like the other, mostly anonymous Christian texts with which we have compared the Baḥîrâ legend, it shows a detailed knowledge of the *Qur'ān*, and of Islamic religious beliefs and practices generally. It is likely that it was intended to play a role in discouraging conversion to Islam on the part of socially upwardly mobile Christians. In it one can also see the attempt on the part of Christians to find a theological rationale for the appearance and success of Islam in the world. But the most important thing to notice in this unique document is the fact that in it the author manages to

117 For the bibliographical information on these two works, see above, nn. 31 & 38.

118 See J. Bignami-Odier & M. G. Della Vida, "Une version latine" and Robert W. Thomson, "Armenian Variations on the Bahira Legend," in I. Sevcenko & F. E. Sysyn (eds.), *Eucharisterion: Essays Presented to Omeljian Pritsak* (Harvard Ukrainian Studies, vol. III/IV; Cambridge, Mass., 1979-1980), pp. 884-895; *idem*, "Muḥammad and the Origin of Islam in the Armenian Literary Tradition," in Dickran Kouymjian (ed.), *Armenian Studies/Études Arméniennes in Memorian Haïg Berbérian* (Lisbon, 1986), pp. 829-858.

combine in the same work the two literary reactions to Islam that had appeared in the Christian communities, apocalypse and apologetics. Furthermore, in its literary history the work shows the progression of thought from Syriac to Arabic which parallels the actual growth of the Christian reaction to the religious challenge of Islam, from an apocalyptic assessment in traditional theological terms to dialectical engagement in inter-religious controversy.

THE KITĀB MIṢBĀḤ AL-ʿAQL OF SEVERUS IBN AL-MUQAFFAʿ: A PROFILE OF THE CHRISTIAN CREED IN ARABIC IN TENTH CENTURY EGYPT

Severus (or Sawīrus) ibn al-Muqaffaʿ (c. 905-987) is the earliest Coptic Christian whose name we know who made it a point to write Christian theology in Arabic. Today his name is widely recognized in the scholarly community in the West because, since the early eighteenth century, it has been associated with the influential *Historia Patriarcharum Alexandrinorum*, a reference work which has become indispensable to historians of medieval Egypt.[1] But in the Coptic community his fame rests almost entirely on his prowess as an Arabic-writing apologist for the Christian faith in its Coptic formulation. In the Arabic-speaking world Severus' apologetic works have been among the most frequently copied and the most widely disseminated of Arab Christian texts. As for the *History of the Patriarchs of Alexandria*, Johannes den Heijer has now conclusively shown that it is not a work of Severus, but it is a compilation which has its origins in the work of an eleventh century Alexandrian deacon of the Coptic church, by the name of Mawhūb ibn Manṣūr ibn Mufarrij al-Iskandarānī.[2]

The purpose of the present essay is to highlight the career of Severus ibn al-Muqaffaʿ, the Christian apologist. To this end one might take advantage of the ready availability, in two recent editions, of one of Severus' more interesting apologetic works, the *Miṣbāḥ al-ʿAql*.[3] It is a short work; in fact, it is little more than a pamphlet. But in it Severus provides an outline of Christian faith and practice, and of the apologetic enterprise as he conceives of it. The very brevity of the work puts into high relief the intellectual methods he employs here and elsewhere, and it the most readily identifies the

[1] See C.F. Seybold, *Severus ibn al-Muqaffaʿ, Alexandrinische Patriarchengeschichte von S. Marcus bis Michael I (61-767), nach der Ältesten 1266 geschriebenen Hamburger Handschrift im arabischen Urtext herausgegeben* (Hamburg, 1912); C.F. Seybold, *Severus Ben al-Muqaffaʿ, Historia Patriarcharum Alexandrinorum* (CSCO, vols. 52 & 59, Beyrouth/Paris, 1904-10); B. Evetts, *History of the Patriarchs of the Coptic Church of Alexandria* (PO; Paris, 1904-15), vols. I, 99-214, 381-619; V, 1-215; X, 357-551; O.H.E. Burmester *et al.*, *History of the Patriarchs of the Egyptian Church, known as the History of the Holy Church* (4 vols.; Cairo, 1943-1974).

[2] See J. den Heijer, *Mawhūb ibn Manṣūr ibn Mufarrig et l'historiographie copto-arabe; étude sur la composition de l'Histoire des Patriarches d'Alexandrie* (CSCO, vol. 513; Louvain, 1989).

[3] R.Y. Ebied & M.J.L. Young, eds. & trans., *The Lamp of the Intellect of Severus ibn al-Muqaffaʿ, Bishop of al-Ashmūnain* (CSCO, vols. 365 & 366; Louvain, 1975); S.K. Samir, *Sawirus ibn al-Muqaffaʿ (10th century), The Lamp of Understanding* (Arabic Christian Tradition, 1; Cairo, 1978).

interlocutors he has in mind, against whose theses he advances the claims of the Christian doctrines. Given the two editions of the work, it also affords one the opportunity to observe the trials of the modern editors of Arab Christian texts of the Middle Ages and to assess their respective editorial methods. Accordingly, the present inquiry will proceed from a brief review of Severus' life and works, to a consideration of the text and the contents of the *Miṣbāḥ al-ʿAql*. From the perspective of the methodological outline of this work, the study proceeds to examine how, within the intellectual milieu of Islam, this Coptic Christian author employed the vocabulary and the intellectual concerns of Muslims to commend the veracity of Christian doctrines.

1. *Severus' Life and Works*

As is the case with so many of the writers of the early Islamic period, not much is known about the biography of Severus ibn al-Muqaffaʿ beyond what can be gleaned from his surviving works, and from brief references to him in other texts. Only two dates are known with precision. A note at the end of one of his works mentions the year "six hundred and seventy-two of the era of Diocletian,"[4] i.e., 955 A.D., as the year in which he composed the text. In the other instance, Severus' name is mentioned in a letter written in the year 987 A.D. by the Coptic patriarch Philotheus (979-1003) to the Syrian Orthodox patriarch of Antioch, Athanasius V (987-1003).[5] For the rest, dates in his life must be deduced from references in his works to the patriarch said to be reigning at a particular time.

Most commentators date the birth of Severus between the years 910 and 915. Since he is known to have been an octogenarian, and the year 987 is the latest date recorded in reference to him, they put the time of his death somewhere around the beginning of the eleventh century. Early in his life, as we learn from a number of scribal notes included in the transmission of his works, Severus went under the name of Abū al-Bishr and served as a *kātib* in government service. This circumstance presumably explains the facility he acquired in the Arabic language. At a now unknown date prior to the middle of the tenth century he underwent a religious conversion and entered the monastic life. It was at this point in his career that he adopted the name "Severus," presumably in memory of the great Monophysite bishop, Severus of Antioch (512-518), who had lived in Egypt for many years after his deposition from the patriarchal throne, and who was the principal formulator of the standard Christological doctrine which is at the heart of

[4] L. Leroy, *Sévère ibn al-Moqaffaʿ, évêque d'Aschmounaïn, Histoire des Conciles (second livre)* (Patrologia Orientalis, 6; Paris, 1911), 590 [126].

[5] J.S. Assemani, *Bibliotheca Orientalis Clementino-Vaticanae* (vol. II; Rome, 1721), 142.

Coptic orthodoxy, based as it is on the theology of the great Cyril of Alexandria (378-444). As for the sobriquet, Ibn al-Muqaffaʿ (son of the shrivelled, or crippled one), which unfailingly accompanies Severus' name in the manuscripts, one no longer knows to just what circumstance it refers.

It was Patriarch Theophane (953-956) who chose Severus to become the bishop of al-Ashmūnayn, the ancient Hermopolis Magna in the district of Antinoopolis. Today the city is reduced to a small village in the district of al-Roḍa in the province of Asyūṭ, not far south of modern Minia.[6] It was in his capacity as bishop of this city that Severus achieved his fame, not only as a writer but as a Christian controversialist.

In the *History of the Patriarchs* Severus is depicted as an active controversialist in behalf of the Christian religion. According to one account he was in league with a man called al-Wāḍiḥ ibn Rajā, who had converted from Islam to Christianity, and had become a monk of Scetis, taking the name of Paul.[7] Together the two of them met "to examine the books of God for the enlightenment of their minds and their nature, so that they might interpret spiritual books."[8] Ibn Rajā is said to have gone on to write two books of his own in defence of the faith, directed largely against Muslims. In one of them, according to the *History of the Patriarchs*, he recounts the story of a Muslim convert to Christianity in Baghdad who had become a martyr. He was a member of the reigning dynasty called al-Hāshimī, that is to say, a member of the Meccan clan of al-Hāshim to which Muḥammad had belonged.[9] Ibn Rajā reportedly heard the story from Severus. In its outline this martyr's story reminds the modern reader of the story of St. Antony Ruwaḥ, or Rawḥ al-Qurashī, who was a Muslim convert from the caliphal family who was executed at al-Raqqa on 25 December 799. The account of his martyrdom was written in Arabic in the Melkite monastic communities of Palestine in the early ninth century.[10] Perhaps Severus had the story from this source and passed it on orally to Ibn Rajā. If so it suggests that Severus, a Copt of the tenth century, was familiar with the Arab Christian literature of Palestine which had begun appearing in the monastic communities there as early as the eighth century.[11]

[6] See Stefan Timm, *Das christlich-koptische Ägypten in arabischer Zeit* (Teil I, A-C; Wiesbaden: Dr. Ludwig Reichert Verlag, 1984), "al-Ašmūnēn," 198-220.

[7] See V. Frederick, "Waḍiḥ ibn Rajā, al," in *The Coptic Encyclopedia* (New York & Toronto: Macmillan, 1991) vol. 7, 2311.

[8] A.S. Atiya, Y. ʿAbd al-Masīḥ, & O.H.E. Khs.-Burmester, *History of the Patriarchs of the Egyptian Church* (vol. II, 2, Cairo, 1948), 165 & 110.

[9] See Atiya, *History of the Patriarchs*, 165-7, 110-12.

[10] See I. Dick, "La passion arabe de S. Antoine Ruwaḥ," *Le Muséon* 74 (1961), 109-33; S.K. Samir, "Saint Rawḥ al-Qurasi; étude d'onomastique arabe et authenticité de sa passion," *Le Muséon* 105 (1992), 343-59.

[11] See S.H. Griffith, *Arabic Christianity in the Monasteries of Ninth-Century Palestine* (London:

Another event in Severus' life which the historical sources report with pride is the occasion in the reign of the Fāṭimid caliph al-Muʿizz (969-975), when Severus is said to have gone to the caliph's *majlis* in the company of the patriarch Ephraem ibn Zurʿa (975-979), for the purpose of engaging in a debate with a Jew whom the texts call Mūsā, a protégé of the caliph's vizir of Jewish origin, Yaʿqūb ibn Killis (930-991).[12] Bernard Lewis has shown that this Mūsā was none other than the caliph's Jewish physician, Mūsā ibn Elʿāzār, who had accompanied al-Muʿizz from North Africa to Egypt, and whose identity had been masked in medieval Jewish sources under the name Palṭiel.[13] As for the vizir, he was in fact himself a noted host of debates in his own *majlis*, which on one occasion at least featured Karaites and Rabbanites arguing with one another while the vizir and his Muslim attendants ridiculed Jewish prayers and beliefs.[14] This circumstance will become relevant later in the present study when we will find Severus reporting Karaite beliefs.

Apart from the *History of the Patriarchs of Alexandria*, which is often wrongly attributed to him, medieval bibliographers assign more than twenty different titles to Severus. Michael of Tannīs, who was one of the continuators of the *History of the Patriarchs* not more than fifty-some years after Severus' death (1051), claimed twenty works for him,[15] while the fourteenth century bibliographer Abū al-Barakāt ibn Kabar listed twenty-six works.[16] Of these, and more which have come to light only in modern times, only a few, less than a quarter of the total, have been edited and published. Among them is Severus' most popular work, which survives in some sixty manuscripts. It has been entitled by its modern editor, *Kitāb al-durr al-thamīn fī īḍāḥ al-dīn*.[17] It is a long presentation of the principal doctrines of the Christian religion in its Coptic form, in an Arabic idiom which echoes the Islamic milieu within which it was written. Unfortunately, this work has never been translated into a western language, nor until now has it received any critical study. What is more, it carries the same title, in part, of another work by Severus, which

Variorum, 1992). See also S.K. Samir, "The earliest Arab Apology for Christianity (c. 750)," in S.K. Samir & J.S. Nielsen, *Christian Arabic Apologetics during the Abbasid Period* (Leiden: Brill, 1994), 57-114.

[12] See Atiya, *History of the Patriarchs*, 92-4, 137-40.

[13] Bernard Lewis, "Palṭiel: a Note," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 30 (1967), 177-81.

[14] See M.R. Cohen & S. Somekh, "In the Court of Yaʿqub ibn Killis: a Fragment from the Cairo Geniza," *Jewish Quarterly Review* n.s. 80 (1989/1990), 283-314.

[15] Atiya *et al.*, *History of the Patriarchs* II/2, 2-4, 161.

[16] See the list published in G. Graf, "Zwei dogmatische Florilegien der Kopten," *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 3 (1937), 61-2.

[17] M. Jirjis, *Kitāb al-durr al-thamīn fī īḍāḥ al-dīn* (Cairo, 1925). A virtual re-edition of this text appeared in Cairo in 1971, with only minor additions, and the unaccountable omission of chap. IX. In this connection see also R.Y. Ebied & M.J.L. Young, "A Theological Work by Severus ibn al-Muqaffaʿ from Istanbul: MS Aya Sofia 2360," *Oriens Christianus* 61 (1977), 78-85.

has been only partially published, the *Kitāb al-durr al-thamīn fī īḍāḥ al-iʿtiqād fī al-dīn*.[18] This book is a lengthy Christological *florilegium* containing patristic texts in Arabic translation which support the theology of the doctrine of the Incarnation as it is presented in the Coptic church. The confusion of titles is symptomatic of one of the major problems facing scholars who study the works of Severus; not only do the titles vary in the manuscripts, but Severus himself often refers to his own books under different titles.

Other published texts of works by Severus include a refutation of his Melkite adversary, Saʿīd ibn Biṭrīq, Eutychius of Alexandria (d. 940),[19] and a commentary on the Creed which, like the refutation of Eutychius, also goes under the title of the *History of the Councils*.[20] Finally, there is an intriguing work entitled by its modern editors *Affliction's Physic and the Cure of Sorrow*.[21] Unlike the other works attributed to Severus, which are resolutely theological, this one ties in with a well known philosophical tradition of a sort which reminds the editors of Severus' work of Yaʿqūb ibn Isḥāq al-Kindī's (c. 800-c. 867) *Risāla fī al-ḥīla li-dafʿal-aḥzān*. Indeed, they find parallels both in topics and in language between the two works, sufficient to suggest to them that "the Coptic Bishop may have drawn inspiration from the work of the Muslim philosopher."[22]

A concluding word may be said about Severus and the *History of the Patriarchs of Alexandria*. Assuming it to be an authentic work of the bishop, there are some scholars who have devoted whole studies to aspects of his literary style and to the evolution of his thought, basing themselves largely on this text.[23] But at the same time recent studies have shown, first, that any role Severus may have played in the composition of the *History* had to

[18] P. Maiberger, *"Das Buch der kostbaren Perle," von Severus ibn al-Muqaffaʿ; Einleitung und arabischer Text (Kapitel 1-5)* (Wiesbaden, 1972).

[19] P. Chébli, *Réfutation d'Eutychius par Sévère, (le livre des conciles)* (Patrologia Orientalis, 3; Paris, 1905), 125-242 [1-122]. See also G. Troupeau, "Une réfutation des Melkites par Sévère ibn al-Mouqaffaʿ," in C. Laga, J.A. Munitz & L. van Rompay, eds., *After Chalcedon; Studies in Theology and Church History* (Leuven, 1985), 371-80.

[20] See n. 4 above.

[21] R.Y. Ebied & M.J.L. Young, eds. & trans., *Severus ibn al-Muqaffaʿ, Affliction's Physic and the Cure of Sorrow* (CSCO, vols., 396 & 397; Louvain, 1978). See also S.K. Samir, "Ce que l'on sait de la "Medicina Moeroris et Curatio Doloris" de Sawīrus ibn al-Muqaffaʿ (Xᵉ siècle)," *Le Muséon* 89 (1976), 339-52.

[22] Ebied & Young, *Affliction's Physic*, vol. 397, vi. On al-Kindī's work see Thérèse-Anne Druart, "Al-Kindi's Ethics," *Review of Metaphysics* 47 (1993), 347-56.

[23] Notable among them is F. Rofail Farag who, in the 1970's, devoted a string of articles to the study of the thought and language of Severus, basing himself almost exclusively on the *History of the Patriarchs*: "The Technique of Research of a Tenth-Century Christian Arab Writer: Severus ibn al-Muqaffa," *Le Muséon* 86 (1973), 37-66; "A Comparison of Severus ibn al-Muqaffa's Literary Technique in his two Works, the "History of the Patriarchs" and the "Book of the Councils" I & II," *The Annual of Leeds University Oriental Society* 7 (1969-73), 50-3; "The Usage of the Coptic Language as a Constituent Element of the Literary Form of Severus ibn

have been limited to the collection of Coptic texts and their translation into Arabic,[24] and secondly, that even this limited role in the end must be denied to him. The recent studies of Johannes den Heijer have made this conclusion abundantly clear.[25] Nevertheless, the attachment to the traditional claims to Severus' authorship remains strong in some quarters, with the result that in *The Coptic Encyclopedia* one may still find both contradictory views put forward.[26] The fact is that there is no place for the *History of the Patriarchs of Alexandria*, or for any part of it, in the list of the Arabic works of Severus ibn al-Muqaffaʿ.

The progression of events in the life of Severus from *kātib* to Christian convert and monk to Coptic bishop is not unique to him. One can point, for example, to the somewhat similar career of Zacharias, Coptic bishop of Sakhā, whose *floruit* was the late seventh—early eighth century.[27] The Arabic Jacobite Synaxary for 21 Amschir (February 15) contains a biographical sketch of Zacharias.[28] He came from a family of scribes and served for a time as a secretary in the vizir's *diwān*, before becoming a monk in the Monastery of John the Little in the Wadi Natrun, ancient Scetis. He went

al-Muqaffa," *Bibliotheca Orientalis* 33 (1976), 275-83; "The Technique of Presentation of a Tenth-Century Christian Arab Writer: Severus ibn al-Muqaffaʿ," *Arabica* 24 (1977), 66-87, also published in *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 127 (1977), 287-306; "The Usage of the Early Islamic Terminology as a Constituent Element of the Literary Form of a Tenth-Century Christian Arab Writer: Severus ibn al-Muqaffa," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 99 (1979), 49-57.

[24] See D.W. Johnson, "Further remarks on the Arabic History of the Patriarchs of Alexandria," *Oriens Christianus* 61 (1977), 103-16.

[25] In addition to the work cited in n. 2 above, see also J. den Heijer, "Sawīrus ibn al-Muqaffaʿ, Mawhūb ibn Manṣūr ibn Mufarrig et la genése de 'l'Histoire des patriarches d'Alexandrie,'" *Bibliotheca Orientalis* 41 (1984), 336-47; "*L'Histoire des Patriarches d'Alexandrie*: Récension primitive et vulgate," *Bulletin de la Société d'Archéologie Copte* 27 (1985), 1-29; "Réflexions sur la composition de *l'Histoire des Patriarches d'Alexandrie*: les auteurs des sources coptes," in W. Godlewski, ed., *Coptic Studies; Acts of the Third International Congress of Coptic Studies, Warsaw, 20-25 August, 1984* (Varsovie, 1990), 107-13. See also *idem*, "The Composition of the *History of the Churches and Monasteries of Egypt*: Some Preliminary Remarks," in D.W. Johnson, *Acts of the Fifth International Congress of Coptic Studies, Washington, 12-15 August 1992* (Rome, 1993) vol. II, 209-19.

[26] See A. Atiya, "Sawirus ibn al-Muqaffaʿ," *The Coptic Encyclopedia*, vol. 7, 2100-2; and J. den Heijer, "History of the Patriarchs of Alexandria," vol. 4, 1238-42; "Mawhūb ibn Manṣūr ibn Mufarrij al-Iskandarānī," vol. 5, 1573-4.

[27] See G. Graf, *Geschichte der christlichen arabischen Literatur* (5 vols.; Studi e Testi, 118, 133, 146, 147, 172; Città del Vaticano: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 1944-53) vol. I, 472-3; G.D.G. Müller, "Zacharias, Saint," *The Coptic Encyclopedia*, vol. 7, 2368-79. Müller has studied the homiletic style of Zacharias in his *Die alte koptische Predigt (Versuch eines Überblicks)* (Ph.D. diss.; Heidelberg, 1953), 23-4, 61-74, 300-49; *idem*, "Einige Bemerkungen zur ars praedicandi der alten koptischen Kirche," *Le Muséon* 67 (1954), 231-70.

[28] René Basset, *Le Synaxaire arabe jacobite (rédaction copte). III. Les mois de Toubeh et d'Amchir. Texte arabe publié, traduit et annoté* (Patrologia Orientalis, XI; Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1915), 838-9 [804-5].

on to serve as Bishop of Sakhā (Greek Xois, Coptic Sekoou) in the Delta region of Egypt for some thirty years. Zacharias is credited with the composition in Coptic of a panegyric to the monastery's patron saint, John the Little.[29] A Syriac version of this panegyric survives in B.L. Add. 14645, a manuscript written in the neighbouring Monastery of the Syrians in A.Gr. 1247, A.D. 935/936 during the abbacy of Moses of Nisibis.[30] It is stated in the manuscript that the Syriac *tashʿīthâ* was translated from Arabic (*leshânâ ṭayyâyâ*).[31] One wonders if Zacharias himself, with his Arabic proficiency, might have been responsible for the Arabic version as well.[32]

2. *Kitāb Miṣbāḥ al-ʿAql: the Text*

The *Kitāb Miṣbāḥ al-ʿAql* is one of the shorter works written by Severus ibn al-Muqaffaʿ; it is in fact not much more than a pamphlet in length. It survives in three known manuscripts, but only two of them, from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries respectively, have been available for inspection.[33] Like other works of the same author, so too this one carries slightly different names in the half dozen places where it is mentioned. Samir Khalil Samir has concluded that the original work carried the title *Miṣbāḥ al-ʿAql*, which in due course came to be supplemented by a subtitle, *Al-Istibṣār fī madhāhib al-Naṣārā*, "The Lamp of the Intellect; a Reflection on the Tenets of the Christians."[34]

At this remove in time it is impossible to know just when in his career Severus wrote the *Miṣbāḥ al-ʿAql*, although, given the numerous references in it to earlier works, it is clear that relatively speaking it must come among his later writings. In its form it is an apologetic tract which puts forward and briefly discusses many of the Christian doctrines and practices which

[29] The Coptic version was edited and translated into French by E. Amélineau, *Monuments pour servir a l'histoire de l'Egypte Chrétienne. Histoire des monastères de la basse-Égypte; vies des saints Paul, Antoine, Macaire, Maxime et Domèce, Jean le Nain &a. Texte copte et traduction française* (Annales du Musée Guimet, 25; Paris: E. Leroux, 1894), 316-410.

[30] An edition and translation of the Syriac text, based on two thirteenth century Syriac manuscripts, Paris B.N. Syriac 235 and B.L. Add. 14732, can be found in F. Nau, *Histoire de Jean le Petit. Hégoumène de Scelé, au IVe siècle; version syriaque editée et traduite* (Paris: Picard, 1914).

[31] W. Wright, *Catalogue of the Syriac Manuscripts in the British Museum, Acquired since the Year 1838* (3 vols.; London: British Museum, 1870-72) vol. III, 1116.

[32] The Arabic version is extant in a sixteenth century manuscript, Göttingen Arabic MS 114. See P. Peeters, *Orient et Byzance: le tréfonds oriental de l'hagiographie byzantine* (Subsidia Hagiographica, 26; Bruxelles: Société des Bollandistes, 1950), 153.

[33] On the manuscripts, and for a detailed discussion of all of the technical matters related to the recovery and identification of the text see S.K. Samir, "Un traité inédit de Sawirus ibn al-Muqaffaʿ (10e siècle:) 'Le Flambeau de l'Intelligence,'" *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 41 (1975), 150-210. See also S.K. Samir, *The Lamp of Understanding*, 64 (intro.)

[34] See Samir, "Un traité inédit," 178-84.

are presented at much greater length in other works, like the two which in their modern, published editions are both called *Al-Durr al-thamīn*.[35] In his introduction to the work, Severus presents it as an epitome, a presentation in brief of things which he has discussed at greater length elsewhere. He addresses himself to someone who has asked him for a summary presentation of Christian teachings. He says,

> You call to mind how the adversaries of our religion find our tenets repugnant and shy away from our doctrines. You have not been able to find a book by anyone of our predecessors in which there is a description of the tenets of the Christians, by way of elucidation and epitome, such as to eliminate their doubts, and to interpret what is vague to them. Everything you come upon by our colleagues is prolix in what it says and professes. You have asked me to provide for you a summary account of our doctrines and to make clear for you the basic concepts of our religion . . . so that both the ignorant person might bear it in mind and the intelligent person might reflect on it.[36]

After some protestations of his unworthiness for the task he has been asked to perform, Severus goes on to say at the end of his introduction that in the *Miṣbāḥ al-ʿAql*, "We have made every effort to elucidate, to summarize, and to make clear. We have left out the argumentation concept by concept, along with the refutation of the adversaries, so as to mention it in the books suitable for it."[37] Then, towards the end of the book he reiterates this point. He says, "Because our purpose here is to be brief, we have brought up many concepts without any argumentation for them; you asked us only to give an account of our creed, not to argue against our adversaries."[38]

Severus discusses seventeen topics in all in the *Miṣbāḥ al-ʿAql*. They are: the creator God; the hypostases; Christ; the Incarnation; the Prophets and Apostles; Christ's human functions; the Resurrection; religious Law; Prayer; Fasting; Feast days; Almsgiving; Food; Ordinances and Judgments; Marriage; Divorce; Slaves. Although the book was meant for Christian readers, by the second half of the tenth century when it was written more or less this sequence of topics had become fairly standard in presentations of Christian faith in the Islamic milieu. It includes first of all those doctrines which it was paramount to defend, because they were just about in direct contradiction to the *Qurʾān*. Then there are the standard practices of Christian life, and the rules of conduct according to which Christians might strive to lead their lives. All

[35] See above, nn. 17 & 18.
[36] S.K. Samir, *The Lamp of Understanding*, 5 (text). For reasons which will become clear below, all references to Severus' *Miṣbāḥ al-ʿAql* will be to Samir's edition; all the English translations are my own.
[37] Samir, *The Lamp of Understanding*, 11 (text).
[38] Samir, *The Lamp of Understanding*, 88 (text).

of these matters had to be set out in Arabic in such a way that they not only rang true to Christian ears, but would fortify the reader in his faith, against the ever present challenge to convert to Islam.

The surprising thing about the *Miṣbāḥ al-ʿAql* is that although it is only a minor work of Severus ibn al-Muqaffaʿ, and not a very popular one to judge by the fact that it has survived in only three known manuscripts, in the 1970's it appeared all of a sudden, after centuries of neglect, in two published editions. Undoubtedly its very brevity, and the scarcity of the manuscripts known to contain it, attracted the attention of scholars. But the editions are very uneven in quality.

Ebied and Young's edition is based on a single manuscript, now kept in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris, Paris Arabic MS 212, written in the year 1601 A.D. by the deacon Ibrāhīm ibn Shaykh al-Tāj ibn Yūsuf al-Badhramānī, as one learns from the colophon.[39] The editors have reproduced in print the text of the work as they have read it in the manuscript. Such corrections as they have seen fit to make are in the notes to the text. The translation then follows not the printed text, but the text as corrected in the notes.

Samir Khalil's edition is in fact based on two manuscripts, the Paris text of 1601 and a manuscript of the year 1787/1788 A.D. from a private collection in Aleppo, which he has been able to consult. He mentions other manuscripts which are reported to contain the work, but he was not able to use them in his edition of the text.[40] Throughout his edition Samir Khalil has listed the differences between his readings and those of Ebied and Young. Furthermore, his method of editing the text differs radically from that of his predecessors. Taking into account the manuscript witnesses he had at his disposal, Samir Khalil sets down the text in grammatically correct sentences, divided into sense units and liberally supplied with titles and subtitles, all the while relegating to the notes not only the variant readings but most of the words of the text as they actually appear in the manuscripts. His conviction is that medieval scribes are responsible for the many "mistakes" in grammar and orthography which appear in the manuscripts, when they are measured against the conventions of classical Arabic, which he supposes a *kātib* such as Severus would have written. The result is that Samir Khalil's readings of the manuscripts are actually to be found in the notes, and the printed text, in the form in which the reader has it before him, is the editor's reconstruction of the text of the work, in an effort to approach as nearly as possible to that form of the text which in all likelihood, in the

[39] See the MS described in Ebied & Young, *The Lamp of the Intellect*, vol. 365, vii-ix.
[40] See the discussion of the MSS in Samir, *The Lamp of Understanding*, 48-50, 64.

editor's judgment, reproduces the work as it left the hands of its author.[41] What makes his edition preferable to that of Ebied and Young for one who wants to read what Severus actually wrote, is that for all its lack of convention Samir Khalil's edition actually includes a more trustworthy reading of the manuscripts, albeit one must constantly go from the notes, where he prints what he thinks the manuscripts actually say, to the edited text, where he spells out what he thinks they really mean.

3. *Religious Discourse in the Miṣbāḥ al-ʿAql*

Although the *Miṣbāḥ al-ʿAql* is only a minor work of Severus ibn al-Muqaffaʿ, which seems to have had only a limited circulation when one compares its three or four manuscripts to the sixty or more which are known to contain the much longer *Kitāb al-durr al-thamīn fī īḍāḥ al-dīn*, it nevertheless affords one the opportunity to catch a glimpse of Severus' apologetic enterprise in the Islamic milieu in which he lived. It was a milieu of change in Egypt, which involved a dynastic shift in the power structure. Severus certainly began his writing career in the time of the Ikhshīdids, and was busy with his histories of the councils during the regency of the eunuch Kāfūr (946-68). But by this time he was already a veteran disputant. In his *History of the Councils, Book II*, which he wrote in the year 955, Severus mentions in passing his debates with a *mutakallim*, who must have been a Muslim, and he says that he would give an account of it in a forthcoming *Kitāb al-majālis*.[42] But Muslims and non-Monophysite Christians were not Severus' only adversaries. We have already seen that in al-Muʿizz' reign (953-975), and presumably after the year 973, when the Fāṭimid caliph moved his court from North Africa into Egypt, Severus engaged in a public debate with the caliph's Jewish physician. What is more, he is credited with a book, *Al-Bāhir fī radd ʿalā al-Yahūd wa al-Muʿtazila*, to which he alludes twice in the *Miṣbāḥ al-ʿAql*.[43] So it is clear that in the second half of the tenth century in Egypt there was an on-going public debate in Arabic between Jews, Christians and Muslims, in which Severus was an avid participant. The Fāṭimid caliphs themselves seem to have encouraged these debates, which took place at a time when the fortunes of the church were coming to be more and more

[41] Samir has explained his method of editing texts, and his concern for what he calls their *lisibilité*, in S.K. Samir, "La tradition arabe chrétienne, état de la question, problèmes et besoins," in S.K. Samir, ed., *Actes du premier congrès international d'études arabes chrétiennes* (Orientalia Christiana Analecta, 218; Rome, 1982), 52-9, 74-85.

[42] See L. Leroy, *L'Histoire des Conciles*, 504 [40]. Nothing further is heard of this *Kitāb al-majālis*.

[43] See Samir, *The Lamp of Understanding*, 34 (intro.).

intertwined with the affairs of the caliphate,[44] and which would take a dramatic turn for the worse in the reign of the third Fāṭimid caliph, al-Ḥākim bi-Amr Allāh (996-1021). But by this time Severus ibn al-Muqaffaʿ was surely out of the picture.

The *Miṣbāḥ al-ʿAql*, pamphlet though it is, which, as the author himself said, leaves out all of the arguments for the doctrines which it proposes, is nevertheless an abbreviated statement of Severus' whole controversial and apologetic programme. He not only intends to state the beliefs of Coptic Christians in Arabic, but here, as elsewhere, he also intends to sketch the polemical line for his adversaries in the same language. It is in fact the Arabic language itself that is of primary concern to him, because he is aware that in his own day Coptic, hitherto the vehicle of his faith, has effectively passed away.[45] He put the problem this way in the *Kitāb al-durr al-thamīn fī īḍāḥ al-dīn*, where he wrote:

> I recall, my friend, that in these times differing statements about the Orthodox Faith abound among the Copts. Every one of them has an opinion which is at variance with the opinion of every other one, and he calls him an infidel. You are astonished at this and bewildered, but you should not be astonished at it. The reason for this ignorance of theirs involves their language, because the Arabic language has overcome them. There is noone of them left who knows what he is reading about in church in the Coptic language. They have come to the point of hearing but not understanding. And for this reason there has disappeared from among them that knowledge of the Christian creed, which in the beginning had held the upper hand over all the tribes of Christendom.[46]

If, as Severus said, in his day the "Arabic language had overcome" the Copts, it is clear that his own apologetic/polemical programme was aggressively to state Coptic Orthodoxy in Arabic. The programme is evident in

[44] See M.P. Martin, "Une lecture de l'Histoire des Patriarches d'Alexandrie," *Proche-Orient Chrétien* 35 (1985), 22-7. There even survives part of a Christological text which is attributed to the Caliph al-Muʿizz. See L. Massignon, *Recueil de textes inédits concernant l'histoire de la mystique en pays d'Islam* (Paris: P. Geuthner, 1929), 215-7. See also G. Troupeau, "Un traité christologique attribué au calife fatimide al-Muʿizz," *Annales Islamologiques* 15 (1979), 11-24.

[45] On the problem of the historical demise of the Coptic language, see L.S.B. MacCoull, "Three Cultures under Arab Rule: the Fate of Coptic," *Bulletin of the Society for Coptic Archaeology* 27 (1985), 61-70.

[46] Jirjis, *Kitāb al-durr al-thamīn*, 261-2. In the *History of the Patriarchs* there is a passage in a preface, wrongly attributed to Severus, in which the author/compiler says of a number of his Arabophone colleagues that he "begged them to assist me in translating the histories that we found written in the Coptic and Greek languages into the Arabic tongue current among the people of the present day in the region of Egypt, most of whom are ignorant of the Coptic and the Greek, so that they might be satisfied with such translations when they read them." B. Evetts, "History of the Patriarchs of the Coptic Church of Alexandria," *Patrologia Orientalis* 1 (1907), 115. See also the strong remarks of the eighth century author of the *Apocalypse of*

the *Miṣbāḥ al-ʿAql.* Not only does he clearly state the doctrines, but in the process he identifies the adversaries. This feature of the work is particularly interesting because, as noted before, no reasons or arguments for the doctrines are given, but Severus is careful to name his adversaries, as if the very naming of them in this Arabic-speaking milieu is an important part of establishing doctrinal identity. Some of these adversaries are the ancient adversaries of record, others are contemporaries, figures in the Islamic world whose names Severus' readers in tenth century Egypt would presumably be expected to recognize.

Among the ancient adversaries of record Severus mentions the troika, Marcion, Mani, and Bar Dayṣān twice, once as opponents of the true Christian idea of God as a single being (*Allāh jawhar wāḥid*), and once as adversaries of the prophets and messengers (*al-anbiyāʾ wa al-rusul*) of God, whose laws (*sharāʾiʿ*), he says, Christ came to renew.[47] Muslims would certainly have had no objection to these allegations, and in this connection, it is interesting to note that the names of these same three adversaries continued to appear not only in Christian texts but in Islamic ones as well.[48] Similarly, Severus names in the same breath, "Arius, Eunomius, and Plato the philosopher," as adversaries of the Christian idea of one creator God.[49] And he goes on in the same place to name Aristotle as another adversary, by reason of his idea of the eternity of the world. On the other hand, in another place Severus names Hermes, Plato, Pythagoras, and Amonius as ancient philosophers who used the names "Father," "Son," and "Holy Spirit" in talk about God, in a way congenial to the later Christian usage.[50]

Jews are prominent among the contemporary adversaries whom Severus names in the *Miṣbāḥ al-ʿAql.* This is not surprising, given the fact that he was remembered in Christian sources as the man who successfully engaged in public debate with the caliph's Jewish physician. At one point he even mentions that he is the author of a number of books *"fī al-radd ʿalā al-Yahūd."*[51] And indeed the surviving lists of his works do mention two such books.[52] On the one hand Severus levels familiar charges against the Jews: he mentions "what the Jews did with Christ,"[53] and he charges the Jews

Samuel of Qalamūn, in J. Ziadeh, "L'Apocalypse de Samuel, supérieur de Deir-el-Qalamoun," *Revue de l'Orient Chrétien* 20 (1915-17), 379-83.

[47] See Samir, *The Lamp of Understanding*, 17 and 48.

[48] See, e.g., G. Vajda, "Le témoignage d'al-Māturīdī sur la doctrine des Manichéens, des Dayṣānites et des Marcionites," *Arabica* 13 (1966), 1-38.

[49] See Samir, *The Lamp of Understanding*, 18.

[50] See Samir, *The Lamp of Understanding*, 21.

[51] Samir, *The Lamp of Understanding*, 88.

[52] See Graf, "Zwei dogmatische Florilegien der Kopten," 61-2.

[53] Samir, *The Lamp of Understanding*, 58.

with saying that God forbids almsgiving and doing good on the Sabbath.[54] He also cites "some Jews and a group of Muslims" who maintain that anyone who goes beyond the prescribed number and mode of the daily prayers is "an insubordinate innovator."[55] And he puts Jews together with other adversaries in the matter of the proper understanding of the divine attributes. He says, "The Jews, Sabellius, and the Muʿtazila, . . . make the attributes of the Creator names devoid of meanings."[56] But he can also be specific and even personal in his charges. In connection with the creation of the world, Severus says:

> The matter from which the philosophers maintain that the world was created is originated, intelligible, caused. The command in the act of creation (*al-amr fī al-khalq*) did not redound to an angel (*malʾak*), as the Jews say, nor to a minor god (*ilāh saghīr*) as Benjamin al-Nahāwandī maintains, nor to the stars as Plato says.[57]

What is striking in this passage is that Severus attributes to the Jews in general a view that in his day was ascribed by al-Qirqisānī to the ninth century Karaite, Benjamin ben Moses al-Naʿāwandī (c. 830-860),[58] while to the latter, Severus ascribes by name a doctrine which in fact reflects a Karaite polemical charge against the Rabbanites. Al-Qirqisānī, for example, says that in Rabbanite thought the figure of Metatron, the angel highest in the celestial hierarchy, amounts to a "minor god" (*adonay qaṭān*).[59] What is perhaps even more striking is that if Severus should mention any Jewish scholar by name, it should have been al-Naʿāwāndī, one of whom it is surprising that he would have heard at all. The only reasonable construction to put upon it seems to be a polemical one. That is to say, that Severus would have been aware of the Karaite vs. Rabbanite tension within the Egyptian Jewish community, such as emerged into the open in Ibn Killis' *majlis*,[60] and that

[54] See Samir, *The Lamp of Understanding*, 81.

[55] Samir, *The Lamp of Understanding*, 71.

[56] Samir, *The Lamp of Understanding*, 30.

[57] Samir, *The Lamp of Understanding*, 68.

[58] Al-Qirqisānī, who wrote in Arabic in the 10th century, spoke of Benjamin al-Nahāwandī as follows: "He asserted that the Creator created nothing but a single angel, and that it was this angel who created the entire world, sent out prophets and commissioned the messengers, performed miracles and issued orders and prohibitions; and that it is he who causes everything in the world to happen without [the interference of] the original Creator." Trans. L. Nemoy, quoted from Colette Sirat, *A History of Jewish Philosophy in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 1985), 37. See also H.A. Wolfson, "The Pre-Existent Angel of the Magharians and al-Nahāwandī," *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 51 (1960-61), 89-106.

[59] B. Chiesa and W. Lockwood, *Yaʿqūb al-Qirqisānī on Jewish Sects and Christianity; a Translation of Kitàb al-anwàr, Book I* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1984), 128 and 174, n. 70. I owe this reference to the kindness of Prof. Haggai Ben Shammai of the Hebrew University, Jerusalem.

[60] See the work cited in n. 14 above.

having heard the names of prominent Karaite thinkers, he used that of al-Na'āwandī in the passage quoted here for polemical purposes. It is, of course, somewhat ironical that Severus characterizes al-Na'āwandī's views by quoting a phrase used by his Karaite colleagues to discredit a Rabbanite view!

Severus is sparing in naming his contemporary Christian adversaries in the *Miṣbāḥ al-ʿAql.* While he is very careful to state the views of Coptic orthodoxy clearly, and even defensively, particularly in that section of the pamphlet in which he discusses food, drink, fatigue, crucifixion and death in connection with Christ,[61] he makes no mention in this connection of the rival Chalcedonians, or Nestorians. In fact he mentions the Nestorians explicitly only in connection with his discussion of marriage and divorce, and then he singles out twice the famous patriarch and *catholicos*, Timothy I (780-823).[62] Surprisingly in so small a work, Severus does refer by name to two of the Cappadocian fathers of the church, Basil of Caesarea and Gregory of Nyssa.[63] In the context of the Coptic church in tenth century Egypt it seems clear that other Christians are really not the adversaries he most has in mind in this small pamphlet. Rather, it is the intellectual challenge of Islam that is his principal concern.

The Arabic diction of the *Miṣbāḥ al-ʿAql*, like Severus' other apologetic works, seems overwhelmingly Islamic, even when he is talking about things specifically Christian. He makes his case for the credibility of Christian teaching by couching his arguments in the terms of issues actively under debate in the Islamic community, and particularly among the *mutakallimīn.* But the most significant presence of Islam in the *Miṣbāḥ al-ʿAql* is the way in which the faith of the *Qur'ān* sets the very parameters of the religious discourse in the work, and even determines the topics and the order in which they come up for discussion. As a small book, even a pamphlet, with all of the arguments left out of it, and with all of the references Severus includes in it to other works of his own, some nine in all, it puts into high relief just how determining Islam has become, even for the presentation of Christian theology in Arabic. The book allows us to see that the challenge before Severus was not just to translate Coptic Christianity into Arabic, but to accommodate the presentation of the faith to the new world order. For by Severus' day Islam in Egypt had in large part already brought about a "unified society," which Albert Hourani has recently described so evocatively. He wrote:

> By the third and fourth Islamic centuries (the ninth or tenth century A.D.) something which was recognizably an "Islamic world" had emerged. A traveller around the world would have been able to tell, by what he saw and heard, whether a land was ruled and peopled by Muslims.... The great buildings above all were the external symbols of this "world of Islam...." By the tenth century, the men and women in the Near East and the Maghrib lived in a universe which was defined in terms of Islam.... Time was marked by the five daily prayers, the weekly sermon in the mosque, the annual fast in the month of Ramadan and pilgrimage to Mecca, and the Muslim calendar.[64]

[61] See Samir, *The Lamp of Understanding*, 49-61.
[62] See Samir, *The Lamp of Understanding*, 92, 94-5, 98.
[63] See Samir, *The Lamp of Understanding*, 51 and 75 respectively.

The Arabic language was, of course, the principal carrier of the Islamic culture. And concerning the Copts of his day Severus said, as we have already mentioned twice, "the Arabic language has overcome them."[65] So the challenge was obviously to transmit the traditional faith of the church in an Arabic idiom, the religious vocabulary of which was already in large part co-opted by Islam. Severus himself realized this fact and he adverted to it at the beginning of the *Kitāb al-durr al-thamīn fī īḍāḥ al-dīn*, as he was beginning his discussion of the mystery of the Trinity. He said:

> I say that the reason for the concealment of this mystery from the believers at this time is their association with foreigners. And due to the loss of their original Coptic language, in which they used to become acquainted with their own doctrine, they have come to the point of not hearing any mention of the Trinity among themselves except rarely, nor is there any mention of the "Son of God" among them except in the way of a figure of speech. Rather, most of what they hear is that God is singular (*fard*), everlasting (*ṣamad*),[66] and the rest of that kind of language which "the others" (*al-ghayr*, i.e., the Muslims) speak. The believers have become accustomed to it and they are brought up on it, with the result that the very mention of "the Son of God" has come to the point of being difficult for them, and they are not aware that it has any explanation or meaning. Most of them, when they hear of "the Son of God," and "the Son of the Virgin Mary" suppose that his beginning was from the Virgin Mary, exactly as "the others" suspect we are saying. They do not know that he is eternally with God, born of Him before Mary and before all the ages, because God has never ever been without him, because he is His Son, his eternal Word, who has always been, and never will cease to be with Him.[67]

It was not just a matter of apologetics and polemics, but of Christian theology in a new key. For Severus' challenge was not only to rebut the objections of Muslims or Jews to Christian doctrines, but to articulate in a new idiom for a new milieu the Christians' own understanding of themselves and of their faith. The result, as we see it in the theological works of Severus

[64] A. Hourani, *A History of the Arab Peoples* (London: Faber & Faber, 1992), 54-7.
[65] Jirjis, *Kitāb al-durr al-thamīn*, 261.
[66] See Q 112:2.
[67] Jirjis, *Kitāb al-durr al-thamīn*, 7-8.

ibn al-Muqaffaʿ is a particularly eloquent instance of a new profile in Christian thought, one which acculturates the expression of the faith to the Arabic-speaking world of Islam. This new profile is especially well put into high relief in the *Miṣbāḥ al-ʿAql*, precisely because of its summary, outline-like character.

It is important to give due emphasis here to the point that what Severus wrote is not merely apologetics or polemics. Nor is it simply a matter of putting Greek or Coptic words and phrases into the Arabic language, as if the confessing mind behind it remained unaffected by the idiom of Islam. Rather, Islam and the Arabic *Qur'ān* evoked a new expression of Christianity which in many ways has the marks of doctrinal development about it. Before the time of Severus, and after him too, other Arab Christian writers faced the same challenge, and it is remarkable how concordant is the profile of the expression of the faith in the Islamic milieu that we find in the works of each one of them. In the *Miṣbāḥ al-ʿAql* it is as if it was Severus' primary purpose to highlight this profile for its own sake. It is not claiming too much to say that the line of thinking which is evident in this theological profile became the structural framework of the Arabophone Christian's way of expressing the faith in "Islamic" terms, of formulating the traditional truths of Christianity in Arabic in response to the ever more insistent call to Islam. The fact that some modern, western commentators with more evangelical concerns, have found this Arabic statement of Christian identity wanting, does not mean that Christianity has failed in Arabic. It simply means that few moderns have taken the trouble to read the Arab Christian religious texts on their own terms.[68]

In Severus' *Miṣbāḥ al-ʿAql* one may consider the Arab Christian profile of theological identity both in a comprehensive way, and as it manifests itself in particular issues. From the comprehensive perspective it is instructive to take note of the fact that of the seventeen topics the work discusses, fully ten of them are not doctrinal points of belief at all. They concern the practice of the Christian life, matters of law and religious observance, such as times of prayer, fasting and feasting, as well as the rules governing almsgiving, food, marriage, divorce, and slaves. One finds this same conjunction of topics, with some variations among the practical matters, discussed in many other Arab Christian summaries of the faith.[69] It reminds the reader that in the Islamic context, it was not uncommon for Christians to be asked

[68] See, e.g., Kenneth Cragg, *The Arab Christian; a History in the Middle East* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991). See also S.H. Griffith, "Kenneth Cragg on Christians and the Call to Islam," *Religious Studies Review* 20, 1 (Jan., 1994), 29-35.

[69] See S.H. Griffith, "Ḥabīb ibn Ḥidmah Abū Rā'iṭah, a Christian *mutakallim* of the First Abbasid Century," *Oriens Christianus* 64 (1980), 161-201.

about religious practice.[70] For while the *Qur'ān* says, "Let the Gospel people judge according to what God has sent down in it," (Q 5:47) Muslims were aware that the Gospel in the form in which Christians have it, does not contain those practical rules of behaviour such as are in the *Qur'ān*. Rather, Christians conducted their daily affairs in compliance with the ancient canons of the church, many of which are reflected in the *Miṣbāḥ al-ʿAql*. The fact that so many of the brief, compendious statements of Christian faith in Arabic do contain rules for such things as prayer, fasting, and almsgiving suggests that in the Islamic world, so conscious of religious *praxis*, Christians too became concerned for their distinctive observances, putting an emphasis on them that was uncommon in texts other than homilies or collections of canons prior to the consolidation of the Islamic commonwealth.

Another comprehensive feature of the *Miṣbāḥ al-ʿAql* is Severus' use in it of Arabic words and phrases which have a decidedly Islamic cast to them. One cannot list them all here, but a few notable instances will suffice to make the point. For example, in the introduction Severus speaks of the *madhāhib al-Naṣārā*,[71] using the *Qur'ān*'s word for "Christians" (e.g., in Q 2:62), when otherwise it would seem more likely to find a Christian writer like himself speaking of *al-madhhab al-masīḥī*.[72] Similarly, he readily uses the *Qur'ān*'s word for "Gospel," i.e., *al-injīl* (e.g., in Q 3:3), which one seldom if ever finds in earlier Arab Christian texts. He uses the *Qur'ān*'s term *aḥbār* (e.g., in Q 5:44) to refer to the patriarchs and wise men of the Jews.[73] He speaks of *al-rusul wa-al-anbiyā'*,[74] evoking thoughts of the prophetology of the *Qur'ān*. He refers to God "sitting on *al-ʿarsh*," echoing the *Qur'ān*'s way of speaking (e.g., in Q 7:137). Prominent too in Severus' talk of God are the *ṣifāt Allāh*, the *Qur'ān*'s "beautiful names" of God,[75] which figured so importantly in the discussions of the contemporary *mutakallimūn*, Muslim and Christian alike. And there are other words and phrases in the idiom of the *Qur'ān*, such, for example, as *al-nashr wa-al-ḥashr* (Q 50:44), or *sarmadī* (Q 28:71-2), which had already passed into the general religious vocabulary, even of Christians, and inevitably shaped their conceptions of the ultimate realities. The point of mentioning this representative selection of the *Qur'ān*'s diction in Severus' work at all is simply to highlight the comprehensive way in which this use of Arabic to set forth Christian teaching already betrays the shaping influence of Islam in Christianity's new kerygmatic expression.

[70] The *praxis* issue came up in the earliest dialogue texts. See, e.g., F. Nau, "Un colloque du patriarche Jean avec l'émir des Agaréens," *Journal Asiatique* 11th series 5 (1915), 225-79.

[71] Samir, *The Lamp of Understanding*, 5, 92, 100.

[72] See, e.g., Jirjis, *Kitāb al-durr al-thamīn*, 20 and *passim*.

[73] Samir, *The Lamp of Understanding*, 7.

[74] Samir, *The Lamp of Understanding*, 34 and 37.

[75] See, e.g., Samir, *The Lamp of Understanding*, 61, 67.

Undoubtedly, the most comprehensive feature of the profile of Christian thought in Arabic, as it is discernible in Severus' *Miṣbāḥ al-ʿAql*, or indeed in any other Arab Christian work, is the response to the *Qurʾān*'s challenge to the inter-related doctrines of the Trinity and the Incarnation. Inevitably, every treatise in Christian *kalām* addresses these issues as the first order of business, and they do in fact also affect the discussion of all other topics.[76] It has been the concern of many modern commentators to analyse in some detail the language which the Arab writers employ to render the traditional Greek, Syriac, or Coptic Trinitarian and Christological terms into Arabic. But a problem has also come to the fore in this enterprise, and it is twofold. In the first place, some scholars often seem to assume that for the Arab writers of Christian *kalām* it was simply a matter of substituting Arabic terms for the technical terms of Greek Trinitarian theology, and that there is nothing much to be concerned about in the variety of terms one finds in different works by the same author, or in the works of different authors over a considerable length of time, and in many different milieux.[77] To take this approach is to accept the presupposition that there was no re-thinking of the best way to express Christian doctrine in terms of its presentation in the idiom of Islam. The corollary is the faulty notion that precise lexical studies are unnecessary in Arab Christian texts. In the second place, scholars of these texts have often ignored the fact that Islam has not only determined that the doctrines of the Trinity and the Incarnation will certainly come up for discussion in Christian Arabic treatises, but the burgeoning religious sciences of the Muslims, particularly in the ninth and tenth centuries, inevitably shaped the discourse and the thinking of the Christian writers who addressed themselves to these topics.[78]

Severus' *Kitāb al-Miṣbāḥ al-ʿAql*, precisely because of its brevity and its schematic character, allows one to observe these processes at work in their sharpest outline. Due to the restraints of time and space we limit ourselves here to studying his presentation of the doctrine of the Trinity. Two chapters of the book are dedicated to this topic under the titles: "Our Doctrine of the Creator; Faith in the One God," and "Our Doctrine of the *aqānīm*."[79]

[76] For example, in the *Kitāb al-durr fī īḍāḥ al-iʿtiqād fī dīn* Severus begins and ends his presentation of Coptic Christology with discussions of the Trinity and Unity of God, in chapters 1 and 15. See Maiberger, *Das Buch der kostbaren Perle*, 73-4, 118-20.

[77] An example of this approach is the work of R. Haddad, *La Trinité divine chez les théologiens arabes (750-1050)* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1985).

[78] For an early example of this phenomenon see S.H. Griffith, "Faith and Reason in Christian *Kalām*: Theodore Abū Qurrah on Discerning the True Religion," in Samir & Nielsen, *Christian Arab Apologetics during the Abbasid Period*, 1-43.

[79] Samir, *The Lamp of Understanding*, 12-32. It is customary to translate the term *al-uqnūm* (pl. *al-aqānīm*) into western languages using the transliterated Greek term *hypostasis*, which has a very precise meaning in theological texts. The Arabic term is similarly a transliterated one,

Severus begins his chapter on the Christian doctrine of the one God by straightaway invoking the attribute of God as Creator (*al-bārī*, *al-khāliq*), and by using it continuously throughout the discussion. This is immediately to claim common ground with both Jews and Muslims, with whom he was in constant doctrinal controversy, but with whom on this point he is in complete agreement, against the claims of certain philosophical schools whose influence was popular in the Islamic world of the tenth century.[80] Next, Severus moves directly to the statement of the Christian Trinitarian faith which it will be his purpose to explain, if not to defend, in what follows. He says of the Creator God, "We acknowledge Him to be Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, one being (*jawhar*),[81] one nature (*ṭabīʿa*), and one essence (*dhāt*)."[82] And he explains that Christians only say Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in the first place, "as the Gospel (*al-injīl*) has taught us."[83] This claim is itself a strong one in the Islamic milieu in which it is maintained that on this very point Christians have corrupted the teaching of what the *Qurʾān* calls the *injīl* which God gave to Jesus, son of Mary, to transmit to his people.[84]

The first of the two major issues to which Severus addresses himself in this chapter is the sense of his affirmation that the Creator God is a "single being" (*jawhar wāḥid*), and this inquiry leads him to distinguish between two groups of scholars in the Islamic world of his time whose business

from the Syriac technical term *qnûmâ*, which, *mutatis mutandis*, in Christian theological texts has much the same meaning as the Greek term *hypostasis*. While the Greek term has immediate recognition in western theological language, to use it alone to translate *al-uqnūm* removes the contextual nuances of the Arab Christian text, in which it evokes the consciousness of the Islamic rejection precisely of "the *aqānīm* of the Christians." See S.H. Griffith, "The Concept of *al-uqnūm* in ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī's Apology for the Doctrine of the Trinity," in S.K. Samir, ed., *Actes du premier congrès international d'études arabes chrétiennes (Goslar, septembre 1980)* (Orientalia Christiana Analecta, 218; Roma: Pont. Institutum Studiorum Orientalium, 1982), 169-91; B. Holmberg, "The Trinitarian Terminology of Israel of Kashkar (d. 872)," *ARAM* 3 (1991), 53-81.

[80] In modern Christian statements of faith within the Islamic context, this starting point is also sometimes invoked. See, e.g., S.K. Samir, "Une lecture de la foi chrétienne dans le contexte arabo-musulman," *Proche-Orient Chrétien* 42 (1992), 64.

[81] Scholars often translate this Arabic term into English as "substance," as do Ebied and Young in the present instance. See Ebied and Young, *The Lamp of the Intellect*, vol. 366, 3. However, the Greek term which underlies it in the present context is *ousía*, which is better represented in English in the present context as "being." See J.L. Kramer, *Philosophy in the Renaissance of Islam: Abū Sulaymān al-Sijistānī and his Circle* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1986), 188-90.

[82] Samir, *The Lamp of Understanding*, 12.

[83] Samir, *The Lamp of Understanding*, 12.

[84] On the subject of the alleged "corruption" of the scriptures, see I. Goldziher, "Über muhammedanische Polemik gegen Ahl al-Kitāb," *Zeitschrift der deutschen morgenländische Gesellschaft* 32 (1878), 341-87; I. Di Matteo, "Il taḥrīf od alterazione della Bibbia secondo i Musulmani," *Bessarione* 26 (1922), 64-111, 223-60; W. Montgomery Watt, "The Early Development of the Muslim Attitude to the Bible," *Glasgow University Oriental Society Transactions* 16 (1955-6), 50-62; J.-M. Gaudeul and R. Caspar, "Textes de la tradition musulmane concernant le *taḥrīf* (falsification) des écritures," *Islamochristiana* 6 (1980), 61-104.

it was to be concerned about the definition of terms. Severus characterizes them as the "disputants" (*jadaliyyūn*), and the "logical philosophers" (i.e., logicians).[85] This dichotomy fairly well reflects the division and the rivalry between philosophers and *mutakallimūn* in Severus' day, as it was reflected in the literature of the time under the guise of the debate between Arabic Grammar and Greek logic.[86] Severus' point in mentioning these two groups is to situate his use of the word *jawhar* (*ousía*, "being") to designate the one Creator God within the parameters of the contemporary learned discourse in Arabic about God and the ultimate realities. He goes on to point out that no other term which theoretical language provides on the requisite level of abstraction is apt. God cannot be said to be a "body" (*jism*), which some people, namely the logicians, say even the word *jawhar* implies, because none of the "descriptive attributes" (*ṣifāt*) of originated entities (*muḥdathīn*) attach to God, viz.: composition, division, dissolution, coming to be, disintegration, time, or place. Neither can God be said to be an accident (*ʿaraḍ*), because, as Severus says, in the Jewish and Islamic context within which he was reasoning, "there is the consensus (*al-ijmāʿ*), already arrived at, to the effect that the Creator, mighty and exalted be He, is eternally and everlastingly existent (*mawjūd*), and in fact, having no need in his existence for any other, because He subsists in his own essence (*qāʾim bi-dhātihi*)."[87] Therefore, of the available designations for entities (i.e., *jawhar*, *jism*, or *ʿaraḍ*) allowed by the "disputants" and the "logicians," when the talk is of God one says that He is *jawhar*, i.e., a substantial being in His own right, because it is impossible that He be a "body," or an "accident."

But even with the term *jawhar* there are difficulties, as Severus was quick to point out. For example, he says that he does not want in this connection to go so far as Aristotle did, and, we might add, as the Arabic-speaking logicians of his own day were doing, to speak about the so-called "first substance" and "second substance" concepts in connection with his use of the term *jawhar* in regard to God. Rather, says Severus, "we only mean He is different from all the bodies, accidents, and imaginable substantial beings (*jawāhir*), because He is existent (*mawjūd*) in actual fact, without any need in his existence (*wujūd*) for anything else."[88]

As for saying that God is one, or a single being (*jawhar wāḥid*), Severus

[85] See Samir, *The Lamp of Understanding*, 14. Ebied and Young unaccountably read *jūliyūn* for *jadaliyyūn*. See Ebied & Young, *The Lamp of the Intellect*, vol. 365, 3 and n. 3.

[86] See M. Mahdi, "Language and Logic in Classical Islam" in G.E. von Grunebaum, ed., *Logic in Islamic Culture* (Wiesbaden, 1970), 51-83; G. Endress, "The Debate between Arabic Grammar and Greek Logic in Classical Islamic Thought," *Journal for the History of Arabic Science* (Aleppo) 1 (1977), 320-2 (English Summary), 339-51 (Arabic); 2 (1978), 181-92 (Arabic).

[87] Samir, *The Lamp of Understanding*, 15.

[88] Samir, *The Lamp of Understanding*, 17.

explains that by this affirmation he means to exclude the option of polytheism. And it is in this connection that he mentions as adversaries not only the "pagans and idolators (*al-ḥunafāʾ wa-al-wathaniyyūn*)," but Mani, Bar Dayṣān, and Marcion as well. In addition to these names Severus also includes here Arius, Eunomius and Plato "the Philosopher." Certainly the first two in this listing are somewhat surprising. It signifies that in Severus' opinion, echoing that of the Cappadocian fathers, Arian theology in its implications effectively compromises the unity of God. Finally, it is also in this connection that Severus mentions the incompatibility with Christian doctrine of what he reports as Aristotle's conception that "the Creator is the whole world and that all is pre-existent."[89] In summary then, the Christian teaching, according to Severus, is that God is "a single *jawhar*, which does not bear a resemblance to any of the *jawāhir* of the world."[90] In the Arabic-speaking context of the Islamic *kalām*, this last affirmation is an important one.

Having strongly affirmed Christian monotheism in the formula familiar to the Arabic-speaking scholars of his day, namely, that the Creator God is a single *jawhar*, Severus then goes on to explain that having taken this position, Christians nevertheless also maintain that "this Creator (*khāliq*) is "living" (*ḥayy*), "speaking" (*nāṭiq*), and His "speaking" (*nuṭq*) is his Word, and His "living" (*ḥayāh*) is His Spirit."[91] Unlike earlier Arab Christian writers, e.g., Theodore Abū Qurra,[92] Severus does not here offer any reason why these two attributes should be singled out from the ninety-nine "beautiful names" of God as signifying any special ontological features of divinity. Rather, here he presumes that the Christian doctrine is known and he confines himself to explaining its terms in an idiom that is common-coin in the Arabic lexicon of religion.

Severus explains that Christians call God's "speaking" (*nuṭq*) his "Son" because it is "generated from his essence (*mutawallad min dhātihi*)," and "language scholars (*ahl al-lughāt*) call whatever is generated from the essence of something a 'son.'"[93] Severus goes on to claim that as a result of this explanation stubborn contentiousness actually subsides because, he says, "the objective is only the verity of the referents (*maʿānī*) more than the names, because names only make a point."[94] With this line of reasoning Severus makes

[89] Samir, *The Lamp of Understanding*, 18.

[90] Samir, *The Lamp of Understanding*, 18.

[91] Samir, *The Lamp of Understanding*, 19.

[92] See S.H. Griffith, "The Controversial Theology of Theodore Abū Qurrah (c. 750-c. 820 A.D.); a Methodological, Comparative Study in Christian Arabic Literature," (The Catholic University of America; Washington, D.C., 1978).

[93] Samir, *The Lamp of Understanding*, 20.

[94] Samir, *The Lamp of Understanding*, 22. This passage is radically different in Ebied and Young, *The Lamp of the Intellect*, vols. 365 and 366, 5, where the Arabic text is read differently.

contact with an issue that was the subject of a considerable amount of discussion and controversy among the Muslim *mutakallimūn* of his day, who were keenly debating the linguistic and ontological significance of terms such as *ism, maʿnā*, and *ṣifa*, precisely in connection with the ontological status of the divine attributes.[95] For his part, Severus is anxious to clarify the import of Christian claims as they find expression in Arabic.[96] So he manages to put the Christian talk of God's "Son" as God's Word (*kalima*) in the context of God's "speaking" (*nuṭq*), which is the "referent" or "meaning" (*maʿnā*) of the descriptive attribute (*ṣifa*) "speaking" (*nāṭiq*) when it is used of God.

As for the Spirit, Severus cites the scriptures as the main source for speaking of the "Spirit of God." But he does also point out that it is reasonable to give the name "Spirit" to the "life" (*ḥayāh*) in virtue of which God may be said to be "living" (*ḥayy*), because the language scholars say that to destroy someone's spirit is to take away his life, or to kill him.[97] So even here he is able to appeal to the conventions of Arabic usage, like the *mutakallimūn*, to make his point. As for calling God's Spirit "holy," Severus explains that it is to differentiate the Holy Spirit from the many spirits of which one might speak.

Arabic-speaking Christians talk of God the Father, his Word, and his Spirit, as three *aqānīm* of the one *jawhar* of the Creator God. And so Severus undertakes to explain the sense of this Syriac word as it is used in Arabic. He says, "In saying *aqānīm* we only mean that as they are descriptive predicates (*ṣifāt*) of this *jawhar*, they are subsistent, constant, eternal, everlasting, and they are not like the *ṣifāt* which come to be and cease to be, nor are they like accidents which pass away and decompose."[98] The operative word here for Severus is *ṣifa*. He uses it in the same way as the Muslim *mutakallimūn* of his day. It signifies a descriptive predicate which has as its meaning, or referent (*maʿnā*), an attribute or actual fact, the existence of which in turn is said to be the cause or ground (*ʿilla*) of the predicative attribution in the first place. So, in the present instance Severus explains that God's factual "speaking" (*nuṭq*) is the referent (*maʿnā*) of the descriptive predicate (*ṣifa*) "speaking" (*nāṭiq*). But, because God's "speaking" is of necessity "subsistent" (*qāʾim*) and "constant" (*thābit*), one might say that the divine essence (*dhāt*) is itself the *ʿilla*, or cause, of the attribution of "speaking" (*nuṭq*) to God, and so God's "speaking" may be said to be "essential" (*dhātī*) and "substantial" (*jawharī*). He goes on to argue that anyone who would deny the subsistence

[95] See R.M. Frank, *Beings and their Attributes; the Teaching of the Basrian School of the Muʿtazila in the Classical Period* (Albany, N.Y., 1978).
[96] See his brief excursus on just this point in Jirjis, *Kitāb al-durr al-thamīn*, 21-2.
[97] See Samir, *The Lamp of Understanding*, 23.
[98] Samir, *The Lamp of Understanding*, 27.

of God's "speaking" (*nuṭq*), or of his Spirit for that matter, "would be denying what they already confessed, and disavowing that of which they had affirmed the existence."[99] And he cites as cases in point, the Jews, the Sabellians, and the Muʿtazila. This list of adversaries immediately constructs the framework of Severus' apologetic discourse. All three groups affirm the existence of the Creator God. But the Jews deny the individual subsistence of God's Word and Spirit. Christian heretics, such as the Sabellians, particularly in connection with their theology of the Word of God, adopt the Monarchian view according to which the Word, or the Spirit, is but a mode or an operation of the Godhead. And in this they are similar to the Muʿtazila who as a group affirm that God speaks, but say that God's "speaking" is an act of speaking that is He, and not a distinguishable divine subsistence in its own right.[100]

Here is the point at which Severus introduces the Christian concept of *al-uqnūm* as it applies to God's Word and Spirit. He says, "We mean that the *ṣifa* of this *jawhar* is subsistent, constant, intelligible, distinguishable. It does not dissolve like accidents, nor does it vanish like sounds and all the speech (*kalām*) of created beings, and like their life and their spirits."[101] He mentions the fact that in Arabic a number of his predecessors have attempted to interpret, or to paraphrase the term *aqānīm* in one or several terms such as *ashkhāṣ, khawāṣṣ, maʿānā*, or *ṣifāt*. But Severus himself claims to have given the clearest account of the matter and that it is of no great significance what terms one uses if the meaning (*maʿnā*) is the same. In this connection it is interesting to note that in his own most popular elucidation (*īḍāḥ*) of the Christian faith, Severus himself consistently refers to God, his "life" and his "speaking" as the three "particularities" (*khawāṣṣ*), Father, Son and Holy Spirit.[102]

In the *Miṣbāḥ al-ʿAql* Severus leaves his discussion of the Trinity at this point and goes on to the topic of Christology. But enough has been said here to highlight his method, and particularly to show how his pre-occupation is to phrase Christian doctrine in an Arabic diction which accurately expresses the Coptic faith. His pre-occupation with language is particularly striking, and this concern distinguishes his work from much earlier Christian theology in Arabic. But the shaping effect of Islam is also clearly evident in the profile of the Christian creed as Severus presents it.

[99] Samir, *The Lamp of Understanding*, 30.
[100] Discussions of the these matters among the Muʿtazila were in fact quite complicated. See Abū al-Ḥasan ʿAlī ibn Ismāʿīl al-Ashʿarī, *Maqālāt al-islāmiyyīn* (H. Ritter, ed., 2 vols.; Istanbul, 1929 and 1930), vol. I, 157-68.
[101] Samir, *The Lamp of Understanding*, 31.
[102] See, e.g., Jirjis, *Kitāb al-durr al-thamīn*, 20.

In the Christological sections of the *Miṣbāḥ al-ʿAql* Severus' purpose was not to argue the numerous issues which divided the Christians in his day. Such was the aim of several of his other works. Rather, in the *Miṣbāḥ* his concern was clearly to state the creed—what Coptic Christians believe about Christ. While he could not draw on the intricacies of Islamic thought about God to aid his exposition, as in the discussion on the doctrine of the Trinity, he did nevertheless make ample use of the testimonies of the earlier "messengers and prophets" to make his points.

In the first place, Severus says simply: "For us the Messiah is the Word of God, His Wisdom and His Power, as scripture says (1 Cor. 1:24) and we call him "Messiah" following God's own manner of speaking in His scriptures."[103] He points out that in Greek "Messiah is interpreted as 'one anointed' (*al-madhūn*), i.e., 'Christ.'" Specifically, he goes on to say, the name "Messiah" is used in connection with Jesus in the Gospel's account of his encounter with the Samaritan woman (cf. John 4:29), and there was already the consensus that a "messiah" would come after "the messengers and the prophets."[104] But the crucial point for Severus, following several of the fathers, he says, is the fact that "the Word did unite with a body and the union is an anointing (*al-masḥa*). For he was only anointed because he was embodied, and "embodiment"/"incarnation" (*al-tajassud*) is the name of his anointing."[105] Furthermore, he says, "the Word is named "Messiah" because it (the Word) is to be particularized (*makhṣūṣa*) by reason of the fact that it will become embodied/incarnate."[106] His point is to make it clear, against his Christian adversaries, that just as the "Son" of God is the "Son" before his second birth in human form, so is the "Messiah" to be named "Messiah" before the union of the divine and the human in the Incarnation. This was an important point in the Christological position Severus defended so vigorously against Nestorians and Chalcedonians alike.

As for the Incarnation itself, Severus was anxious to put the Christian doctrine in the context of God's earlier appearances to the messengers and prophets as recorded in the scriptures. He says, "As for the one who speaks to us from the visible, perceptible body, he is the one who was speaking to Moses from the cloud, as well as to Isaiah, Jeremiah, and the rest of the prophets, and he is the one who disclosed himself to Abraham, Isaac, and Noah."[107] Given this sense of the Incarnation, it was then Severus' concern to explain how Christians understand the human actions ascribed to Christ.

[103] Samir, *The Lamp of Understanding*, 33.
[104] Samir, *The Lamp of Understanding*, 34.
[105] Samir, *The Lamp of Understanding*, 34.
[106] Samir, *The Lamp of Understanding*, 35.
[107] Samir, *The Lamp of Understanding*, 45.

For as he put it, "Our opponents . . . suppose that we ascribe to the eternal, creative essence what we ascribe to corruptible, mutable bodies."[108] And as if in a direct response to Jews and Muslims, or for that matter Nestorians and Chalcedonians, he says, "Whoever slanders us for saying God was killed, and crucified, and died, is ignorant of our doctrines, and unaware of our intention."[109] For as Severus explains, "We say that the Messiah is creator, sustainer, living and knowing, in as much as he is God; and we say the Messiah eats, drinks, is killed, and died, in as much as he is man."[110] The trouble is that, according to Severus, ordinary people do not take the trouble to express themselves exactly, nor do they have a proper understanding of the use of metaphor in speech. He puts it this way, "If the common people were to have an esteem for caution in expression, something crude would not occur to the listener."[111] One could almost say that it was Severus' purpose in the *Miṣbāḥ al-ʿAql* to provide a good example in precisely this matter.

4. *Postscript: Syriac in Tenth Century Egypt*

Just about at the same time as Severus ibn al-Muqaffaʿ was busy beginning to put Coptic thought into Arabic, Egypt was also the scene of an effort to preserve the ancient Syriac heritage of the Christians. So significant was this project for the modern knowledge of Egypt in this period that a word may be said about it here.

A Syrian Orthodox presence, already well established in Egypt by the tenth century, became more prominent during the first part of this century within the monastic centre of the Wadi Natrun, the site of ancient Scetis.[112] It was here at Deir Suriani, the Monastery of the Syrians,[113] that a Syrian Jacobite monastic community flourished under the care of its multi-talented abbot, Moses of Nisibis (fl. 905-943).[114] A bibliophile and gifted

[108] Samir, *The Lamp of Understanding*, 55.
[109] Samir, *The Lamp of Understanding*, 57.
[110] Samir, *The Lamp of Understanding*, 61.
[111] Samir, *The Lamp of Understanding*, 57.
[112] On Syriac-speaking Christians in Egypt see J.M. Fiey, "Coptes et syriaques; contacts et échanges," *Studia Orientalia Christiana Collectanea* 15 (1972-3), 297-365.
[113] Jules Leroy wrote extensively about Deir Suriani over the course of some thirty years. A bibliography of his published works can be found in R.-G. Coquin, "L'abbé Jules Leroy," *Bulletin de l'Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale* 80 (1980), v-xv.
[114] The rather scanty evidence extant for the life of Moses of Nisibis has been collected by J. Leroy, "Moïse de Nisibe," *Symposium Syriacum 1972* (Orientalia Christiana Analecta, 197; Rome, 1974), 457-70. See too the forthcoming paper of M.J. Blanchard, "Moses of Nisibis (fl. 906-943) and the Library of the Monastery of the Syrians," summarized in *Byzantine Studies Conference Abstracts* (1991), 45.

administrator, Moses left his mark on many aspects of the monastery. He substantially augmented the monastery library through an extensive programme of acquisitions, donations and the promotion of on-site scribal activity.[115] The library acquisitions of Moses are marked by a high percentage of manuscripts of the fifth, sixth and seventh centuries. Although the ancient library of Deir Suriani has now been dispersed to other institutions, notably to the British and Vatican Libraries, these manuscripts are the mainstay of modern scholarly studies of Syriac language and literature. Due in large part to the book acquisitions of Moses of Nisibis, credit for having preserved a very significant part of the literary heritage of Syriac Christianity must be given to Egypt, rather than the Syriac-speaking regions of Syria/Mesopotamia proper.

What we know about Moses comes from notes in the Syriac manuscripts of his monastery, as well as from two inscriptions in the monastery's church of the Virgin Mary, al-Hadra.[116] A manuscript note attests to the presence of Moses at the monastery in 906/907.[117] That Moses was *rîsh dayrâ* or head of the monastery in 914 is borne out by one of the church inscriptions in which it is stated that Abbot Moses caused the *haykal* screen to be erected at that time.[118] A second inscription in the church describes another building improvement carried out by Moses in 926/927.[119] Notes in two Syriac manuscripts reveal that Moses went to Baghdad in 927 on account of a poll tax required of monks in Egypt.[120] The Muslim historian al-Maqrīzī in his *History of the Copts* recounted an effort in 925 by a vizier of the caliph al-Muqtadir to impose a poll tax on Christian bishops, monks and the sick in Egypt.[121] He added that the Christians managed to have this measure over-

[115] On the ancient Syriac library see H.G. Evelyn-White, *The Monasteries of the Wadi 'n Natrûn* (3 vols.; Publications of the Metropolitan Museum of Art Egyptian Expedition, II, VII, VIII; New York, 1926-33). An historical sketch of the library, "Excursus: the Library of the Syrian Monastery," can be found in vol. II, 439-58. See also the forthcoming doctoral dissertation of M.J. Blanchard, "The Library of the Monastery of the Syrians" (The Catholic University of America, Washington, D.C.).

[116] For the manuscript notes see n. 103 above. For the church inscriptions see J. Strzygowski, "Der Schmuck der älteren el-Hadrakirche im syrischen Kloster der sketischen Wüste," *Oriens Christianus* 1 (1901), 356-72.

[117] See B.L. Add. 12142 described in Wright, *Catalogue of the Syriac Manuscripts in the British Museum*, vol. I, 97-8.

[118] Leroy, "Moïse de Nisibe," 466-7; Strzygowski, "Der Schmuck der älteren el-Hadrakirche," 364-5.

[119] Leroy, "Moïse de Nisibe," 467; Strzygowski, 367.

[120] B.L. Add. 14531, fol. 157b. See Wright, *Catalogue of the Syriac Manuscripts in the British Museum*, 740; and Evelyn-White, *Monasteries of the Wadi 'n Natrûn*, vol. II, plate VII. Also B.L. Add. 14445, fol. 48; W. Cureton, ed., *The Festal Letters of Athanasius discovered in an Ancient Syriac Version* (London: Printed for the Society for the Publication of Oriental Texts, 1848), xxv-vi.

[121] W. Cureton, ed., *The Festal Letters of Athanasius*, xxiv; F. Wüstenfeld, *Macrizi's Geschichte der Copten; aus den Handschriften su Gotha und Wien mit Übersetzung und Anmerkungen* (Göttingen, 1845), 25 (Arabic), 62 (German).

turned by going to Baghdad to petition the caliph in person. Moses' return to the monastery in 932 is commemorated by a series of notes written in books that he brought back with him. During the five years that he was away Moses collected two hundred and fifty books for the library. The acquisition notes of 932 indicate that he obtained some books by purchase; others were given to him by persons as a blessing.[122] The notes also show that Moses' journey was not limited to Baghdad, but that he sought out books elsewhere. At least, one note states outright that Moses purchased a book in Reshaina, a city in northern Iraq.[123] Although no explicit mention is made of visits by Moses to other cities, the notes do identify the residences of some of the donors and sellers with whom Moses conducted the book transactions. The cities include Edessa, Harran, and Takrit. Although Moses himself claimed Nisibis, the intellectual centre of East Syrian Christianity, as home, it does not figure in the notes.

Moses of Nisibis left a valuable legacy for modern scholars of Syriac. His effort to build a great library for Deir Suriani insured the survival in many cases of ancient Syriac manuscripts that had been removed from the churches, monasteries and towns of Syria/Mesopotamia to the more secluded location of the monastery in the desert of Scetis. As for Moses himself, after his return from Baghdad in 932, he is known to have commissioned two books in 936.[124] Our latest recorded mention of him appears in a note written in a volume of funeral services with a date of A.D. 943. The scribe, who was writing at Ramla in Palestine, praised Moses as: "Mar Moses, our glory and the ornament of all the church, the head of this Monastery."[125]

Summary

After a brief sketch of the career of the Coptic bishop Severus ibn al-Muqaffa', and a survey of his published works in Arabic, the article concentrates on the author's important text called *The Lamp of Understanding (Kitāb*

[122] Little has been written about Syriac book production and book trade. See, however, M.M. Mango, "Patrons and Scribes indicated in Syriac Manuscripts, 411 to 800 A.D.," *Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik* 32/4 (1982), 3-12. For the wider context of the Byzantine sphere, see A. Cutler, "The Social Status of Byzantine Scribes, 800-1500. A Statistical Analysis based on Vogel-Garthausen," *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 74 (1981), 328-34; C. Mango, "The Availability of Books in the Byzantine Empire, A.D. 750-850," in *Byzantine Books and Bookmen* (Dumbarton Oaks Colloquium, 1971; Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks, 1975), 29-45.

[123] B.L. Add. 17182, ff. 1-99. See W. Wright, *Catalogue of the Syriac Manuscripts in the British Museum*, vol. II, 404.

[124] B.L. Add. 14645 and B.L. Add. 14469.

[125] B.L. Add. 14525, ff. 1-10. See Evelyn-White, *Monasteries of the Wadi 'n Natrûn*, vol. II, 338.

miṣbāḥ al-ʿaql). It is a short work, but it is effectively an outline of Severus' whole approach to the presentation of Christian doctrine in Arabic in an Islamic context. Following the general overview of the contents, the article highlights Severus' methods in his discussion of the doctrine of the triune God, emphasizing the ways in which the author's language resonates with that of the Muslim *mutakallimīn.*

THE MUSLIM PHILOSOPHER AL-KINDI AND HIS CHRISTIAN READERS: THREE ARAB CHRISTIAN TEXTS ON 'THE DISSIPATION OF SORROWS'

The works of Christian intellectuals in the early Islamic period are marked by a notable quality which commentators often fail to highlight in what they write about them. This notable quality is the high level of what one might call the 'inculturation', or the integration of Christian thinking into the Islamic Arabic idiom of what in the ninth and tenth centuries was the intellectual culture of the 'Islamic commonwealth' aborning.[1] For it is at this time that a unified Islamic world comes into view historically. Albert Hourani describes it evocatively in the following passage:

> By the third and fourth Islamic centuries (the ninth or tenth century AD) something which was recognizably an 'Islamic world' had emerged. A traveller around the world would have been able to tell, by what he saw and heard, whether a land was ruled and peopled by Muslims. . . . The great buildings above all were the external symbols of the 'world of Islam'. . . . By the tenth century, the men and women in the Near East and the Maghrib lived in a universe which was defined in terms of Islam. . . . Time was marked by the five daily prayers, the weekly sermon in the mosque, the annual fast in the month of Ramadan and pilgrimage to Mecca, and the Muslim calendar.[2]

Much of the literature composed in Arabic by Christians in this time-frame represents a conscious effort on their part to think Christianity into this new intellectual world of Islam. More often than not one must observe the process in somewhat abstruse discussions of topics such as the doctrines of the Trinity and the Incarnation. But there are occasionally issues and ideas in connection with which one can observe the mechanism of accultur-ation at work in a more concrete way. A case in point is a series of at least three Arabic treatises written by Christians from the late ninth to the early eleventh century on the general theme of 'the dissipation of sorrows', all arguably inspired by a sympathetic intellectual vibration with ideas first expressed in Arabic by the 'Philosopher of

[1] See Garth Fowden, *Empire to commonwealth: consequences of monotheism in late antiquity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 160–8.
[2] Albert Hourani, *A history of the Arab peoples* (London: Faber & Faber, 1992), 54–7.

the Arabs,' Ya'qūb ibn Isḥaq al-Kindī (*c.* 800–*c.* 867), in his influential work, *Risālah fī l-ḥīlah li daf' al-aḥzān*.[3]

Al-Kindī on the Dissipation of Sorrows

Al-Kindī's work needs no extensive discussion here since there have been a number of recent scholarly studies of it, several of which rehearse its contents in detail.[4] Suffice it to say for the present purpose that al-Kindī's *The art of dispelling sorrows* is in the literary form of a letter to an unnamed friend who has asked the philosopher to set down some remarks (*aqāwīl*) to counteract sorrows, to point out their deficiencies, and to immunize one against the pain of being in their grip. Most commentators agree that the work has an introduction and three principal parts. In the introduction al-Kindī defines sorrow as 'a pain of the soul occurring from the loss of things loved or from having things sought for elude us'.[5] Then in the first part of the treatise he argues that sorrows are not pains which afflict us by nature but are painful voluntary attitudes of habit and convention. And he cites examples from common experience, as well as well-known stories such as that of the letter of the dying philosopher/king Alexander to his mother, bidding her to summon to the celebration of his memory only those who have known no sorrow. Al-Kindī's purpose is to point out that 'sense perceptible things are repugnant or desirable not by nature, but merely by habit or practice',[6] and that one should direct himself away from objects of sense perception to concentrate on objects in the world of the intellect. In the second part he offers what he calls easy remedies for the pain of sorrow. These consist largely of recommendations from common sense and practice for attitudinal adjustments in regard to the sorrows that plague one. The text is in a popular, even anecdotal style, full of examples from everyday life. The third and final part offers what are styled difficult remedies, and they consist of strategies designed summarily to extirpate desire for external possessions and to cultivate a habit of detachment from

[3] Two readily available editions are H. Ritter and R. Walzer, 'Uno scritto morale inedito di al-Kindī, (Temistio *Peri alupias*?)', in *Atti della Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei* (no. 335, Memorie dell Classe di Scienze Morali, Storiche e Filologiche, serie 6, 16 (1938); Rome, 1938), 5–63; 'Abdurraḥman Badawi, *Traités philosophiques par al-Kindī, al-Fārābī, ibn Bajjah, ibn 'Adyy*, 3rd edn (Beirut: Dar al-Andaloss, 1983), 6–32.

[4] See Simone Van Riet, 'Joie et bonheur dans le traité d'al-Kindī sur l'art de combattre la tristesse', *Revue Philosophique de Louvain*, 61 (1963), 13–23; 'Abdurraḥman Badawi, *Histoire de la Philosophie en Islam* (Paris: J. Vrin, 1972), ii. 456–77; Charles E. Butterworth, 'Al-Kindī and the beginnings of Islamic political philosophy', in *The political aspects of Islamic philosophy: essays in honor of Muhsin S. Mahdi*, ed. C.E. Butterworth (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992), 11–60 (esp. 32–52); Thérèse-Anne Druart, 'Al-Kindī's Ethics', *Review of Metaphysics*, 47 (1993), 329–57.

[5] Druart, 'Al-Kindī's ethics', 350.

[6] Butterworth, 'Al-Kindī and the beginnings', 41–2.

material things, including physical life itself. In this part al-Kindī also cites early models, like Socrates, and he engages in an extended allegory about passengers on a sea voyage, all of whom exemplify the attitudes he means to portray.

Al-Kindī's treatise is very much in the spirit of the Greek thought he customarily expresses in Arabic. Some scholars have tried to search out his sources, some even supposing that his work is a virtual translation of an unidentified Greek original. Others point out its unreconciled Stoic and Neoplatonic features. On the one hand he portrays joy, the antidote to sorrow, as a voluntary, internal attitude which makes one content with what is, while on the other hand he suggests that happiness seems to consist in the objective possession of spiritual goods such as virtues.[7] But there is no overtly religious dimension to al-Kindī's suggestions here. As Charles Butterworth has pointed out, even when he speaks of the Creator, 'he does so on the basis of common opinion rather than on the basis of any divinely revealed texts'.[8] And Thérèse-Anne Druart thinks that '*The Art of Dispelling Sorrows* is an instance of prephilosophical ethics leading to the liberation of the mind from passions and for philosophy'.[9] It may even have been the case that al-Kindī thought that philosophical humanism in an Islamic milieu prepared the mind on a natural level for the acceptance of divine revelation. However that might be, it is clear that for at least three Christian writers in Arabic, his *Art of dispelling sorrows* provided the occasion to suggest that Christian and biblical faith could best address the issues so provocatively and popularly raised by the philosopher. In short, al-Kindī's treatise provided an apologetical opportunity for three Christian writers of theology in Arabic, one a Copt, and the other two members of the Church of the East. They are Elias al-Jawharī, Severus ibn al-Muqaffa', and Elias bar Šinaya of Nisibis, all of whom wrote treatises in part modelled on that by al-Kindī.[10] It is the purpose of the present study briefly to describe these three intriguing texts and to discuss their place in Arab Christian literature.

Al-Kindī's Arab Christian Readers

(a) Elias al-Jawharī

Elias al-Jawharī is a little known figure from the Church of the East in the late ninth century. From all that we can know or deduce about him from the scant documentation remaining, he must have

[7] See Van Riet, 'Joie et bonheur', 21–2.

[8] Butterworth, 'Al-Kindī and the beginnings', 39.

[9] Druart, 'Al-Kindī's ethics', 356.

[10] In the lists of works attributed to al-Kindī's contemporary, the Christian translator and essayist Ḥunayn ibn Isḥāq (808–873/77), a treatise 'On dispelling sorrow' is also included, but it is not known to have survived. See Bénédicte Landron, *Chrétiens et Musulmans en Irak: attitudes Nestoriennes vis-à-vis de l'Islam* (Études Chrétiennes Arabes; Paris: Cariscript, 1994), 70 and n. 229.

flourished in the generation just after the lifetime of the philosopher al-Kindī. He seems first to have served as the bishop for the Church of the East in Jerusalem, under the name of Elias ibn ʿUbayd, before being raised to the metropolitanate of Damascus on 15 July 893. Three works attributed to him survive in the manuscript tradition. They are a treatise on the consensus of the deposit of the faith (*ijtimāʿ al-amānah*), in which the author sets out the confessional formulas of the Church of the East, the 'Jacobites', and the 'Melkites' in their agreements and disagreements; a collection of the canons of 'the fathers of the east'; and a treatise called 'the Consolation of sorrows (*tasliyat al-aḥzān*)'.[11] The present concern is with the last named work, which was published and translated into Italian by Giorgio Levi Della Vida in 1964, and briefly studied by ʿAbdurraḥman Badawi in 1972, but which has since for the most part gone undiscussed by scholars.[12]

One can tell already from the title of the *Consolation of sorrows* that the work is likely to have something in common with al-Kindī's treatise of much the same name, and indeed examination shows that Elias al-Jawharī did in fact quote whole passages from the philosopher's text.[13] But that is not all. Al-Jawharī brings the whole discussion under the wing of Christian theology and includes extensive references to the Bible in his text. In this dress the work must have enjoyed a considerable popularity in medieval Christian communities, since Levi Della Vida has found parts of it preserved in some half dozen manuscripts, in addition to the text of the fourteenth century, Vatican Arabic MS 1492, from which he published most of the work, but which lacks the first leaf, and Paris Arabic MS 206, from which he took the last third of it.[14] But just as a number of modern scholars were disappointed with al-Kindī's work because they judged it to be 'popular' and not rigorously philosophical, so both of the modern commentators on al-Jawharī's essay find it, in Badawi's word, 'of little philosophical interest'.[15] But as a text which commends a certain point of view among Christians living under the rule of Islam, it is of considerable interest.

Like al-Kindī's *The art of dispelling sorrows*, so is *The consolation of sorrows* a letter-treatise, a common literary genre among Syriac and Arabic writers of the period.[16] Elias al-Jawharī addressed it to a

[11] For all but the last named work see Georg Graf, *Geschichte der christlichen arabischen Literatur* (vol. 2; Vatican City, 1947), 132–5.

[12] See Giorgio Levi Della Vida, 'Il Conforto delle Tristezze de Elia al-Gawharī (Vat. ar. 1492)', in *Mélanges Eugène Tisserant* (vol. 2, Orient Chrétien, pt. I, Studi e Testi, 232; Vatican City, 1964), 345–97; Badawi, *Histoire de la philosophie*, ii. 475–7.

[13] Congruent passages are noted by Levi Della Vida as they occur in his Italian version; Badawi cites them by page and line in Badawi, *Histoire de la philosophie*, ii. 476.

[14] See Levi Della Vida, 'Il Conforto delle Tristesse', 349–53, for the details of the MSS and the attribution of the work.

[15] Badawi, *Histoire de la philosophie*, ii. 477.

[16] See the interesting study by Eva Riad, *Studies in the Syriac preface* (Uppsala, 1988).

Christian friend, who, together with two others named in the text as Abū Ayyūb and Abū l-Qāsim respectively, had fallen into disgrace and had presumably been sacked from a high position. Levi Della Vida associated these named persons with the known father and son, Sulaymān ibn Wahb Abū Ayyūb and ʿUbayd Allāh Abū l-Qāsim, who had held the position of *vizir* in the caliphal government in Baghdad and who had been arrested and disenfranchised by al-Muwaffaq, the brother of the Caliph al-Muʿtamid (870–92) in the year 878/79.[17] Levi Della Vida further supposed that these officials belonged to that group of Christians from the Church of the East who in the ninth and tenth centuries had insinuated themselves into positions of power and influence through calculated and duplicitous conversions to Islam. As a matter of fact both Muslim and Christian texts of the period do complain about such people.[18] But the date of the arrest of these two men (878/79) suggested to Levi Della Vida that al-Jawharī must then have composed his treatise before his elevation to the bishopric in the year 893, and perhaps even at a time when he himself might have been an apprentice-monk and student in the environs of Baghdad.[19] While this suggestion is not utterly implausible, it is also worth keeping in mind the possibility that Elias al-Jawharī purposefully may have taken literary advantage of the well known fate of the two *vizirs* from the Church of the East to compose a work in the spirit of al-Kindī which would pointedly commend an appropriately Christian attitude to the vicissitudes of life under the Muslims, especially as they affected those who found a way to better their social prospects by collaboration with their political masters.

At the very beginning of the text al-Jawharī says that he will be offering consolation in the form of 'counsels from the demonstrations of reason and from the testimonies of revelation and exegesis, and by way of calling to mind the accounts of those of God's friends who have been put to the test'.[20] Accordingly the text has two major parts, just about evenly divided in terms of space, in the first of which the author reasons with his reader, and in the second of which he calls to mind the trials of a long list of biblical personalities who underwent trials and tribulations in the service of God. The biblical quotations and allusions are quite freely rendered,

[17] Levi Della Vida, 'Il conforto delle tristesse', 348.

[18] See several passages in the so-called 'Chronicle of Zuqnin', *Incerti Auctoris Chronicon Anonymum pseudo-Dionysianum vulgo dictum*, vol. ii, ed. J.B. Chabot (CSCO 104 (Syr. 53), 1933), 385–9. See also the trenchant remarks of al-Jāḥiẓ in his *Kitāb ar-radd ʿalā n-naṣārā* in J. Finkel (ed.), *Three essays of Abu ʿOthman ʿAmr Ibn Baḥr al-Jāḥiẓ* (Cairo, 1926), 9–38. See also Louis Massignon, 'La politique islamo-chrétienne des scribes nestoriens de Deïr Qunnā à la cour de Bagdad au IXe siècle de notre ère', *Vivre et Penser*, IIe série, 2 (1942), 7–14, reprinted in the author's *Opera minora*.

[19] Levi Della Vida, 'Il conforto delle tristesse', 348.

[20] Ibid., 353.

as if from memory, and some of them are actually impossible to find as cited in the Bible. They include references to the stories of Adam, Cain and Abel, Noah, Abraham and the sacrifice of his son Isaac, Jacob and Esau, Jacob and his son Joseph, a long re-telling of the story of Job, Moses, David, Elijah, Elisha, Micah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, and assorted sayings from the Psalms, Proverbs, and other biblical books which commend patience and long-suffering in adversity. While there is no reference to the Qur'ān or to Muslims, one notices that almost all the figures are such as could easily appear in the abundant Islamic *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā'* literature.

It is in the first part of the work that one finds the extracts from al-Kindī's *The art of dispelling sorrows*, but without any mention of the philosopher's name. They are interwoven with al-Jawharī's more theological reflections, and they are almost all more or less literal quotations of passages in which the philosopher is re-phrasing his definition of sorrow as 'a pain of the soul occurring from the loss of things loved or from having things sought for elude us'.[21] In addition, following al-Kindī's lead, al-Jawharī includes a long account of Alexander's letter to his mother, and reference not only to Aristotle, 'the philosopher', but to al-Kindī's own paragon of virtue, Socrates.

Al-Jawharī's reasoning is not abstruse or complicated. He suggests that God has allowed the disgraced Christians to suffer adversities for their own good. He reminds them that the benefits they had enjoyed had been freely allowed by God, and as freely disallowed. A number of times he compares God's dispositions in these matters to the seemingly harsh treatments physicians sometimes mete out to their patients. One will suffer only so much sorrow as is required to remedy one's spiritual ills. The essence of al-Jawharī's thought on the subject of sorrow in this life is expressed in the following passage, the first part of which actually echoes al-Kindī. He says

> The cure of our souls is a lighter burden than the care of our bodies, because the cure of the soul is not by means of a medicine to be drunk, or of enduring the pain of cauterization, or of the cut of a knife. Rather, it is by means of a strong resolution, and knowledge of past events in times gone by. A strong resolution, together with reflection on this world, the reason for which it was created, its condition, and the condition of its people in it, would facilitate for us the endurance of the anguish of existence, and the acquisition of solace for losses, and the benefit of the things we love, and would induce us to accept with joy God's testing and His discipline, and would prevent us from abhoring it and from despair about it, and would remind us that God's discipline and testing are more advantageous for us than the honors of the world and its favors. . . . He, mighty and praised be He, loves to put the patience of His friends to the the test, and to prove their good intention, and the firmness of their resolutions. . . . Whoever resents God's discipline and His testing, and this is the way of the two of them [i.e., of Abū Ayyūb and Abū l-Qāsim], commits a sin and invites the anger of his Lord.[22]

[21] Druart, 'Al-Kindī's ethics', 350. See the references to the congruent passages cited in n. 24.

Although al-Jawharī has taken advantage of the currency of al-Kindī's treatise to put forward his own ideas about current events in the lives of members of his own Christian community, it is clear from this passage that he has thoroughly theologized the contents. What is more, with the pointed reference to the two disgraced *vizirs*, he applies his theological lesson precisely to the circumstances of the Christian community in the world of Islam of his time. It is a time of God's disciplining and testing of his people, al-Jawharī seems to say, and it should be gladly accepted by Christians as such.

(b) Severus ibn al-Muqaffaʿ

As is the case with so many of the writers of the early Islamic period, not much is known about the biography of Severus beyond what can be gleaned from his surviving works, and from brief references to him in other texts. Only two dates are known with precision. A note at the end of one of his works mentions the year 'six hundred and seventy-two of the era of Diocletian',[23] that is, 955 CE, as the year in which he composed the text. In the other instance, Severus's name is mentioned in a letter written in the year 987 CE by the Coptic patriarch Philotheus (979–1003) to the Syrian Orthodox patriarch of Antioch, Athanasius V (987–1003).[24] For the rest, dates in his life must be deduced from references in his works to the patriarch said to be reigning at a particular time.

Most commentators date the birth of Severus betweeen the years 910 and 915. Since he is known to have been an octogenarian, and the year 987 is the latest recorded in reference to him, they put the time of his death somewhere around the beginning of the eleventh century. Early in his life, as we learn from a number of scribal notes included in the transmission of his works, Severus went under the name of Abū l-Bishr and served as a *kātib* in government service. This circumstance presumably explains the facility he acquired in the Arabic language. At a now unknown date prior to the middle of the tenth century he underwent a religious conversion and entered the monastic life. It was at this point in his career that he adopted the name 'Severus'. As for the sobriquet, Ibn al-Muqaffaʿ (son of the shrivelled, or crippled one), which unfailingly accompanies Severus's name in the manuscripts, one no longer knows to just what circumstance in his life it refers.

[22] Levi Della Vida, 'Il Conforto delle Tristesse', 356 (Arabic), 377–8 (Italian trans.). Levi Della Vida renders the phrase *wa hādhihi sabīluhumā* as 'dei quali questa è la via'.

[23] *Sévère ibn al-Moqaffaʿ, évêque d'Aschmounaïn, Histoire des Conciles (second livre)* ed. L. Leroy (PO 6, 1911), 590 [126].

[24] J.S. Assemani, *Bibliotheca Orientalis* (vol. II; Rome: Propaganda Fidei, 1721), 142.

It was Patriarch Theophane (953–56) who chose Severus to become the bishop of al-Ashmūnayn, the ancient Hermopolis Magna in the district of Antinoopolis in Egypt. Today the city is reduced to a small village in the district of al-Roḍah in the province of Asyūṭ, not far south of modern Minia.[25] It was in his capacity as bishop of this city that Severus achieved his fame, not only as a writer but as a Christian controversialist.

An event in Severus' life which the historical sources report with pride is the occasion in the reign of the Fatimid caliph al-Muʿizz (969–75), when Severus is said to have gone to the caliph's *majlis* in the company of the Patriarch Ephraem ibn Zurʿah (975–79), for the purpose of engaging in a debate with a Jew whom the texts call Mūsā, a protégé of the caliph's *vizir* of Jewish origin, Yaʿqūb ibn Killis (930–91). Bernard Lewis has shown that this Mūsā was none other than the caliph's Jewish physician, Mūsā ibn Elʿāzār, who had accompanied al-Muʿizz from North Africa to Egypt, and whose identity had been masked under the name Palṭiel in medieval Jewish sources.[26] As for the *vizir*, he was in fact himself a noted host of debates in his own *majlis*, which on one occasion at least featured Karaites and Rabbanites arguing with one another while the *vizir* and his Muslim attendants ridiculed Jewish prayers and beliefs.[27]

Apart from the *History of the patriarchs of Alexandria*, which is often wrongly attributed to him,[28] medieval bibliographers assign more than twenty different titles to Severus. Of these, and more which have come to light in modern times, only a few, less than a quarter of the total, have been edited and published. Among them is Severus's most popular work, which survives in some sixty manuscrits. It has been titled by its modern editor, *Kitāb ad durr ath-thamīn fī īḍāḥ ad-dīn*.[29] It is a long presentation of the principal doctrines of the Christian religion in its Coptic form, and in an Arabic idiom which echoes the Islamic milieu within which it was written. Unfortunately, this work has never been translated into a western language, nor has it received any critical study. What is more, it carries the same title, in part, as another work by Severus, which has been only partially published, the *Kitāb ad-durr ath-thamīn fī īḍāḥ al-iʿtiqād fī d-dīn*.[30] This book is a lengthy christological *florilegium*, which presents patristic texts in Arabic translation which support the theology of the doctrine of the Incarnation as it is presented in the Coptic Church. The confusion of titles is symptomatic of one of the major problems facing scholars who study the works of Severus; not only do the titles vary in the manuscripts, but Severus himself often refers to his own books under different titles.

Other published texts of works by Severus include a refutation of his Melkite adversary, Saʿīd ibn Baṭrīq, Eutychius of Alexandria (d. 940),[31] a commentary on the Creed which, like the refutation of Eutychius, also goes under the title of the *History of the Councils*,[32] and a sketch of Coptic theology in Arabic, entitled *Kitāb Miṣbāḥ al-ʿAql*.[33] Finally, there is the intriguing work entitled by its modern editors, *Affliction's physic and the cure of sorrow*.[34]

Both Michael of Tannīs and Abū l-Barakāt ibn Kabar, the two medieval writers who have left lists of works attributed to Severus, mention a treatise called *Ṭibb al-ghamm wa shifāʾ al-ḥuzn*. It has survived in at least eight known manuscripts.[35] In modern times the work attracted the attention of the Syrian Orthodox patriarch Ignatius Ephraem I Barṣawm (1933–57), who published long extracts from the first three chapters of the text as it is preserved in a manuscript of uncertain date kept in St Mark's Monastery in Jerusalem.[36] And now R.Y. Ebied and M.J.L. Young have published an edition of the whole text, together with an English translation, based on three of the eight manuscripts known to contain the work.[37]

The editors of Severus's work on dispelling sorrows venture the opinion that since it resembles al-Kindī's *Risālah* at a number of points, 'this suggests that the Coptic Bishop may have drawn inspiration from the work of the Muslim philosopher'.[38] As we shall see, there are in fact a number of ideas the two works share, but, as one would suspect, the bishop's concerns are of another order than

[25] See Stefan Timm, *Das christlich koptische Ägypten in arabischer Zeit* (Teil I, A-C; Wiesbaden: Dr Ludwig Reichert Verlag, 1984), 'al-Ašmūnēn,' 198–220.

[26] Bernard Lewis, 'Palṭiel: a note', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, 30 (1967), 177–81.

[27] See Mark R. Cohen and Sasson Somekh, 'In the court of Yaʿqub ibn Killis: a fragment from the Cairo Geniza,' *Jewish Quarterly Review*, N.S. 80 (1989–90), 283–314.

[28] See Johannes Den Heijer, *Mawhūb ibn Manṣūr ibn Mufarriǧ et l'historiographie copto-arabe* (CSCO 513 (Subsidia 83), 1989).

[29] Murqus Jirjis, *Kitāb ad-durr ath-thamīn fī īḍāḥ ad-dīn* (Cairo, 1925).

[30] See Paul Maiberger, *'Das Buch der kostbaren Perle', von Severus ibn al-Muqaffaʿ; Einleitung und arabischer Text (Kapitel 1–5)* (Wiesbaden: F. Steiner, 1972).

[31] *Réfutation d'Eutychius par Sévère, (le livre des conciles)* ed. P. Chébli (PO 3, 1905), 125–242 [1–122].

[32] See n. 33.

[33] See *The lamp of the intellect of Severus ibn al-Muqaffaʿ, Bishop of al-Ashmūnain*, ed. R.Y. Ebied and M.J.L. Young (CSCO 365–6 (Ar. 32–3), 1975); Samir Khalil, *Sawīrus ibn al-Moqaffaʿ (10th Century), The lamp of understanding* (Arabic Christian Tradition 1; Cairo, 1978). On this text see the forthcoming study by S.H. Griffith, 'The *Kitāb Miṣbāḥ al-ʿAql* of Severus ibn al-Muqaffaʿ: a profile of the Christian creed in Arabic in tenth-century Egypt', Mingana Conference II, Selly Oak Colleges, Birmingham, 19–21 September 1994.

[34] *Severus ibn al-Muqaffaʿ, Affliction's physic and the cure of sorrow*, ed. R.Y. Ebied & M.J.L. Young (CSCO 396–7 (Ar. 34–5), 1978).

[35] See K. Samir, 'Ce que l'on sait de la 'Medicina Moeroris et Curatio Doloris' de Sawīrus ibn al-Muqaffaʿ (Xe siècle)', *Le Muséon*, 89 (1976), 339–52.

[36] See the journal *Al-Majellah al-Baṭriyarkiyyah al-Suryāniyyah*, 8 (Jerusalem, 1940), 201–12.

[37] See n. 44.

[38] *Affliction's physic*, CSCO 397. vi.

those of al-Kindī; for him the Christian life is the true antidote to sorrow.

The text unfolds in four chapters. In the first one, in virtually the first sentence, Severus lays it down that 'sorrow (*al-ḥuzn*) is a grave disease, and an infectious illness',[39] echoing somewhat the thought of al-Kindī. And he proposes to set forth a remedy to combat it in the treatise. He says

> We shall employ in our discourse three methods of attaining to knowledge: the first is knowledge acquired through the senses, the second is drawing inferences by means of the intellect and ratiocination, and the third is by the Word of Blessed God Most High, revealed for reflection and meditation. To this we shall append a fourth chapter to acquaint thee with accounts of the men of old time, and what befell the chosen, elect ones.[40]

We can see already in this programmatic statement how Severus's purpose differs from al-Kindī's; the bishop will seek a remedy in the Bible. And even when he refers to Aristotle, he explains what the philosopher means with biblical quotations. But first he must identify the origin of grief and sorrow in a world and among human beings whom God had created good and perfect originally. Predictably, Severus finds the cause in Adam's sin: 'He had believed, out of ignorance, that the weak, created, deficient servant could become a god, a lord, a deity and one who is glorified'.[41] Severus, the Copt, then immediately assigns this view as well to 'Nestorius and his two teachers Theodore and Diodore, and before them the mad Arius'.[42]

In chapter II, Severus says, 'Having now explained the origin of Sorrow from the Books of God Most Blessed and High, we may also mention how sorrow is treated in the doctrines of the philosophers'.[43] But he does not deliver on this promise. Rather, he goes on simply to mention that the teachers of the church (*mu'allimī al-bī'ah*) had ably disposed of Mani's teaching regarding the origins of evil and sorrow, to the effect that Satan was their cause. And Severus says that one can do no better than to accept the teachers' doctrine. But then he repeats what he says is their definition of sorrow. He writes, 'Sorrow, according to their principles, is a sickness which befalls the soul at the loss of something loved or in consequence of something wanted'.[44] One notices immediately the almost literal compatibility of this definition with the one given by

[39] *Affliction's physic*, 396. 1 (Arab.), 397. 1 (trans.).
[40] Ibid., 396. 2 (Arab.), 397. 2 (trans.).
[41] Ibid., 396. 7 (Arab.), 397. 5 (trans.).
[42] Ibid.
[43] Ibid., 396. 9 (Arab.), 397. 6 (trans.).
[44] Ibid., 396. 10 (Arab.), 397. 7 (trans.). My version differs from that of Ebied and Young who have: 'Sorrow in the [philosophers'] view is a disease which attacks the soul upon the loss of a loved one, or privation from something desired'. The text reads: *fa'l-ḥuzn 'alā 'uṣūlihim maraḍ ya'ruḍ lilnafs 'inda faqd maḥbūb 'aw ba'da maṭlūb.*

al-Kindī, viz., sorrow is 'a pain of the soul occurring from the loss of things loved or from having things sought for elude us'.[45] One could almost conclude that Severus is here in fact quoting al-Kindī's definition from memory, and attributing it to 'the teachers of the church'. This is literally to adopt the words of the Muslim philosopher as a suitable idiom for the statement of what he presents as Christian teaching. Severus then goes on to explain that sorrow in this sense comes about because a human being 'for the most part inclines towards that which conforms with the sensual part of the soul',[46] and that because of the punishment God visited upon Adam in consequence of his sin of disobedience.

In chapter III Severus then states his conclusion that 'sorrow only afflicts man inasmuch as he brings it upon himself'.[47] And given the dual nature of human beings, composed of spirit and matter, he says, 'it is then incumbent upon persons of intellect to persevere in activities which will bring them to this [rational] abode, and will cause them to achieve this status'.[48] He cites the views of Hermes Trismegistus, St Matthew, Aristotle, Galen and others, to the effect that 'in our present state we are afflicted with a great error in desiring to enjoy the conditions of the world of immortality and permanence in the world of generation and decay'.[49] Rather, we must engage in the pursuit of true philosophy commended by Gregory of Nyssa, Antony, Makarios, Pachomius, Basil and John Chrysostom. Severus says, 'All of this elucidates the merit of the person who philosophizes, for he does not grieve, nor is he sorrowful, nor have regrets, nor repines, since he has seen things as they really are, and conceives of them in their [true] form, and their nature is not hidden from him, and he is not subject to delusion as to their true character'.[50] But this is not the philosophy of al-Kindī; it is the 'philosophy' of the desert fathers.

In the fourth chapter Severus recalls the stories of the biblical characters who gave an example of the attitude one must assume. This attitude Severus sums up in words reminiscent of al-Kindī. He says, 'If the Lender has the right to reclaim what He has lent us, how can it be permissible for us to be grieved, and how can it be permissible for us to allow the soul to be sorrowful over the reclaiming from it of something which did not belong to it?'[51] Biblical characters who personified this attitude were: Job, whose story Severus recalls at length, like Elias al-Jawharī, Abraham, Moses, Isaiah, David, Jeremiah and Daniel. Then he says, 'If we

[45] Druart, 'Al-Kindī's ethics', 350. Al-Kindī's Arabic text is: *'inna l-ḥuzn 'alam nafsānī ya'ruḍ lifaqd al-maḥbūbāt wa fawt al-maṭlūbāt* (Badawi, Traités philosophiques, 6).
[46] *Affliction's physic*, 396. 10 (Arab.), 397. 7 (trans.).
[47] Ibid., 396. 12 (Arab.), 397. 8 (trans.).
[48] Ibid., 396. 14 (Arab.), 397. 9 (trans.).
[49] Ibid., 396. 19–20 (Arab.), 397. 12–23 (trans.).
[50] Ibid., 396. 24 (Arab.), 397. 16 (trans.).
[51] Ibid., 396. 26–7 (Arab.), 397. 18 (trans.).

were to relate the stories of modern people, as we have related the stories of men of old time, their tribulations would appear small to you, and their trials trivial'.[52] So he cites the life of Christ and his disciples and martyrs: Simeon, James the Just, Paul, Thomas, Mark, Ignatius and Cornelius. Severus even advises his readers to have gratitude for their adversities. 'For,' as he says, 'if God's chastisement and testing of us is a wholesome guidance, then we should thank him for it, and not resent it'.[53]

Severus closes his treatise on *Affliction's physic and the cure of sorrow* by recounting the story of Alexander the Great's letter to his mother. We have found this work cited in virtually all the texts considered so far. It is a testimony to its great popularity in both Muslim and Christian circles, furnishing yet another example of a cultural plane on which the two faiths could meet.[54]

(c) Elias bar Šināyâ of Nisibis

Elias of Nisibis was in fact one of the most prolific and influential of the Christian writers of Arabic in the early Islamic period. His bibliography includes numerous treatises, letters and commentaries on all the major topics of interest to Christians, and most of them enjoyed a wide circulation. Born in the year 975, Elias was ordained a priest in the year 994. After a number of years of study in the monastic communities of northern Mesopotamia, notably in Mosul, he was consecrated bishop of Bet Nuhadra in the year 1002. Then, on 26 December 1008, Elias was nominated the metropolitan of Nisibis for the Church of the East and from this date, until his death on 18 July 1046, he was actively engaged in the task of commending Christian doctrines in Arabic, in response to the challenges of Islam. Undoubtedly Elias's most notable work in this regard is the one entitled *Kitāb al-majālis*. It is a compendium of Christian apologetics, cast in the literary form of seven accounts of as many conversations on Christian doctrines between Elias and the *vizir* Abū l-Qāsim al-Ḥusayn ibn ʿAlī al-Maghribī (981–1027). The sessions are said to have been held in Nisibis in July of the year 1026, with subsequent meetings in December 1026 and June 1027.[55]

52 Ibid., 396. 34 (Arab.), 397. 24 (trans.).
53 Ibid., 396. 36 (Arab.), 397. 26 (trans.).
54 See Anton Spitaler, 'Die arabische Fassung des Trostbriefs Alexanders an seine Mutter; ein Beitrag zur Überlieferung des arabischen Alexanderromans', in *Studi Orientalistici in onore di Giorgio Levi Della Vida* (2 vols; Roma: Istituto per l'Oriente, 1956), ii. 493–508.
55 On Elias and his works see G. Graf, *Geschichte der christlichen arabischen Literatur* (Studi e Testi, 133; Vatican City, 1947), ii, 177–89; Emmanuel-Karim Delly, *La théologie d'Elie bar-Šénaya; étude et traduction de ses Entretiens* (Studia Urbaniana; Rome: Apud Pontificiam Universitatem Urbanianam de Propaganda Fide, 1957); Khalil Samir, 'Un auteur chrétien de langue arabe, Élie de Nisibe', *Islamochristiana*, 3 (1977), 257–84; J.-M. Gaudeul, *Encounters and clashes* (2 vols; Rome: PISAI, 1984), i. 100–3; Landron, *Chrétiens et Musulmans en Irak*, 112–20.

Elias's work entitled *Kitāb dafʿ al-hamm*[56] is in the form of a booklet of twelve chapters dedicated to the same *vizir*, Abū l-Qāsim al-Maghribī, with whom the bishop had been in conversation in the sessions reported in the *Kitāb al-majālis*. In the introduction the author explains that, inspired by the work of the Muslim philosopher al-Kindī, he has composed the new treatise in response to the request of the *vizir* for a book dedicated to the subject of the rational management of human anxieties. He then proceeds to commend to the reader the general attitude of gratitude for all he has received, since gratitude tends to drive away anxiety and to fortify the soul. Next, Elias distinguishes two kinds of anxieties, general and particular, and two kinds of virtues, religious and rational. Then in twelve chapters he shows how the religious virtues, duly distinguished from the corresponding vices, counteract general anxieties, and how the rational virtues can allay particular anxieties. The religious virtues are piety, gratitude, chastity, humility, mercy and repentance; the rational virtues are reasonable action, the habit of taking counsel, good conduct, liberality, justice and clemency. He proceeds on three levels: description of the virtues and vices; anecdotes about the virtues from the traditions of many peoples, including Persian, Muslim and biblical sages; and the suggestion of strategems for acquiring the virtues. Elias explains his procedure as follows:

> I will make a book of three parts. I will include in the first part the preliminary description of the virtues, the mention of them, exhortations, sermons, and useful sayings about whatever might help to acquire them. In the second part I will include such stories and tales as may help the one who emulates them to acquire these virtues. In the third part I will include the strategems of the people of grace and knowledge and intelligence, such as will aid the acquisition of [the virtues], taken from various works on the dissipation of sorrows from what the wise Galen and Yaʿqūb ibn Isḥaq al-Kindī and other scholars have composed.[57]

Elias's debt to al-Kindī's way of thinking is evident already in his characterization of the sorrows and anxieties his readers will want to dissipate. He says,

> Since anxieties (*al-humūm*) are to the soul as sicknesses are to the body, the concern must be for dispelling anxieties from the soul more than the concern for dispelling sicknesses from the body, due to the nobility of the soul over the body.[58]

56 Constantin Bacha, *Kitāb dafʿ al-hamm li Iliyyā al-Nasṭûrî muṭrān Naṣîbîn* (Cairo, 1902). Selections of the work have also been published separately. See chap. II in A. Durand and L. Cheikho, *Elementa grammaticae Arabicae cum chrestomathia, lexico variisque notis* (Beirut, 1896), 253–4 and selections from chaps. I, II, III, IV in G. Brahamcha, 'Ṭuruf min kitāb dafʿ al-hamm', *Majallah al-īthār ash-sharqiyyah*, 3 (1927), 55–8; 6 (1927), 161–3; 10 (1927), 257–9; 12 (1927), 339–42.
57 Bacha, *Kitāb daf al-hamm*, 8.
58 Ibid., 6-7.

Elias's treatise on the 'Dissipation of sorrow' seems to have been enormously popular; it reportedly survives in at least sixty-six known manuscript copies, scattered throughout the libraries of the East and the West. Earlier in this century there was a lively debate among scholars about its authenticity as a work of Elias of Nisibis. Some wanted to attribute it to the Syrian Orthodox polymath of the thirteenth century, Gregory Abū l-Faraj Bar Hebraeus (1225–86). But it has now been conclusively shown, by references in letters and citations by other writers, that Elias of Nisibis is truly the author of the work.[59]

Since the one edition of Elias's work is not readily available, and it has never been translated into a Western language, nor has it so far been the subject of an extended scholarly study, one has, per force of these circumstances, to be satisfied for the present purpose with a general description of its contents. But even so, it is clear that while his concern is much the same as that of the philosopher al-Kindī, Elias has a different approach to the problem. Khalil Samir, the modern scholar who has published most on the text, albeit mostly in Arabic, thinks that Elias left it incomplete. Specifically, he thinks that the author meant to include material from al-Kindī's treatise in the third section of the work, the one about strategems for acquiring virtue. But this is only a surmise. At the very least it is clear that he took advantage of the popularity of a line of ethical thinking among Muslim scholars to employ it to commend a Christian way of thinking in Arabic. In short, like the other two Christian writers whose works on this subject we have reviewed, Elias 'theologized' the line of thinking which he found in the popular work of al-Kindī and brought it into the Christian mainstream.

The Consolation of Philosophy

Al-Kindī's treatise on the dissipation of sorrows, along with the three Christian tracts which it inspired, are altogether often thought of as belonging to the literary genre of the 'consolation of philosophy', on the order of Boethius's (*c.* 480–*c.* 524) famous classic of the same name, *De consolatione philosophiae*.[60] But, as we have seen, only al-Kindī's work can, strictly speaking, be said to commend a line of philosophical, or pre-philosophical thinking as a consolation for sorrow. The Christian works all find consolation in the pages of divine revelation, although it is clear that all three of them owe their inspiration to al-Kindī's popular work.

While all three Arab Christian treatises are very different works on their own terms, they all in some part follow the model of al-

[59] See Khalil Samir, 'Un auteur chrétien', 279–81.

[60] See Anicius Manlius Severinus Boethius, *Philosophiae consolatio* (Corpus Christianorum, series Latina, 94; Turnhout: Brepols, 1957).

Kindī's work. And they very much share the purpose of commending an attitude of long-suffering rather than of engaging in rigorous argument. One wonders to what degree the predicament of Christians in Islamic society might have contributed to the popularity of treatises of this sort. The condition of *dhimmitude* under which they lived, even at its best, seems always to have left Christians with a sense of not quite fully belonging to the Islamic commonwealth, however much they may have acculturated themselves to it.

Yet even in these circumstances it is interesting to observe that beyond the technical disciplines of translation, medicine and logic, in which scholars from the Church of the East excelled, it was in the realm of moral thought that Arabophone Christian intellectuals seem to have come the closest to a fuller participation in the thought-world of the Muslims, and this in spite of the fact that it was a *topos* in the polemical literature to accuse Islam of moral laxity.[61] One thinks in this connection not only of an enormously popular treatise like Yaḥyā ibn ʿAdī's *Tahdhīb al-aḫlāq*, which is a special case, but of the 'consolation' literature as well, in which it is clear that in spite of the fact that the Christian writers introduce the dimension of divine revelation, the leitmotiv of these compositions remains that one set by al-Kindī. Accordingly, it is worth pausing here, briefly to consider Ibn ʿAdī's famous treatise, and to compare its methodology with that of the three treatises on the dissipation of sorrows.

The Syrian Orthodox philosopher and theologian Abū Zakariyya Yaḥyā ibn ʿAdī al-Manṭiqī at-Taqrīṭī was born in Taqrīṭ, Iraq, in 893/94. He went to Baghdad to further his education. In the late ninth and tenth centuries Baghdad was the centre of Syriac and Arabic language studies in logic, largely under the auspices of scholars from the Church of the East. There Yaḥyā ibn ʿAdī studied with the logician Abū Bishr Mattā ibn Yūnus (*c.* 870–*c.* 940),[62] a Christian who belonged to the Church of the East, and also with the Muslim philosopher Abū Nasr al-Farābī (*c.* 870–950). After al-Farābī's death, Yaḥyā ibn ʿAdī became the leading exponent of the Aristotelian school in Baghdad. He attracted numerous disciples, both Christian and Muslim, not a few of whom became eminent scholars in their own turn. Yaḥyā was also a prolific writer in the areas of philosophy and Christian theology and apologetics. He translated many Greek works of Aristotle and his commentators from Syriac into Arabic. His Muslim contemporary, Ibn an-Nadīm (d. 995), pays tribute to Yaḥyā ibn ʿAdī for his eminence as a scholar, and draws attention to his atypical religious affiliation for a

[61] See S.H. Griffith, 'Comparative religion in the apologetics of the first Christian Arabic theologians', *Proceedings of the PMR Conference*, Annual Publication of the Patristic, Mediaeval and Renaissance Conference, 4 (1979), 63–87.

[62] See Landron, *Chrétiens et Musulmans en Irak*, 93–4.

scholar of such employment: 'He was unique during his period. He belonged to the Jacobite Christian sect'.[63] In the milieu of Baghdad, the expectation would have been that Yaḥyā would have belonged to the Church of the East. He died in the year 974 and was buried in the church of St Thomas in Baghdad.[64]

One of the most interesting essays to come from the pen of Yaḥyā ibn ʿAdī is the remarkable text, *Tahdhīb al-aḫlāq*, a treatise on the 'improvement of morals'.[65] In many ways it is a classical text of moral philosophy, in the sense that it does not have an original doctrine to put forward. Rather, it reflects typical Greek thinking of the late antique period on the subject of virtue, to which the author attributes no other end beyond itself. Virtue itself suffices, he teaches, to attain that happiness of which human nature is capable. He makes no allusions to the hereafter or to any moral principles deriving from divine revelation. He transmits traditional wisdom, encased in sage counsels and fetching examples. There is nothing even to indicate that the author was a Christian. And this universal character of the work is what made it appeal not only to Christians, but to Muslims as well. In fact, it has over the centuries been attributed to such Muslim notables as al-Jāḥiẓ, Miskawayhī, Ibn ʿArabī and Ibn al-Haytham. It has been only in recent years that it has been shown beyond any reasonable doubt to be a work of Yaḥyā ibn ʿAdī.[66] This popularity of Yaḥyā's moral treatise, known in more than twenty manuscripts, and approaching a dozen printed editions, shows the extent to which a Christian intellectual's work might influence Muslim thought. At the same time, it is clear that he has done so only by leaving out any considerations of divine revelation in his work. Nevertheless, it is also clear that the work represents such a high degree of cultural integration on the part of a Christian writer that a Muslim scholar of modern times could write about the treatise, properly attributed, and without any apparent sense of irony, that 'perhaps the most important feature of *Tahdhīb al-akhlāq* is that it was one of the earliest books on Islamic (*sic*) ethical

[63] B. Dodge, *The Fihrist of al-Nadīm* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1970), ii, 631.

[64] For a portrait of Yaḥyā as an intellectual see Joel L. Kraemer, *Humanism in the Renaissance of Islam: the cultural revival during the Buyid age* (Leiden: Brill, 1986), 104–39. For bibliography prior to 1977 see Gerhard Endress, *The works of Yaḥyā ibn ʿAdī: an analytical inventory* (Wiesbaden: Reichert, 1977). Bibliographical updates to the inventory of Endress can be found in the *Bulletin d'Arabe Chrétien*, 6 (1990), 14–22; 7 (1992), 4.

[65] There are a number of editions of this work. The most recent ones are: Naji al-Takriti, *Yaḥyā ibn ʿAdī, a critical edition and study of his Tahdhīb al-akhlaq* (Beirut: Éditions Oueidat, 1978); Marie-Thérèse Urvoy, *Traité d'éthique d'Abû Zakariyyâ Yaḥyā ibn ʿAdī; introduction, texte et traduction* (Paris: Cariscript, 1991); Samir Khalil Kussaim, *Yaḥyā ibn ʿAdī, Tahdhīb al-ahlāq* (Beirut and Cairo: CEDRAC/Patristic Center, 1994).

[66] See K. Samir, 'Le *Tahdhīb al-aḫlāq* de Yaḥyā ibn ʿAdī (m. 974) attribué a Jāḥiẓ et a ibn al-ʿArabī,' *Arabica*, 21 (1974), 111–38; Samir Khalil, 'Nouveaux renseignements sur le *Tahdhīb al-aḫlāq* de Yaḥyā ibn ʿAdī et sur le '*Taymūr aḫlāq* 290', *Arabica*, 26 (1979), 158–78.

philosophy'.[67] In this regard the contrast with the Arab Christian treatises on the dissipation of sorrows could not be more striking.

Another moment of common interest between Muslim and Christian intellectuals which comes to the fore in Arab Christian treatises on the dissipation of sorrows is the mutual appreciation of the Alexander Romance of late Antiquity, here in the form of Alexander's letter to his mother.[68] This is an instance, along with the philosophical tradition itself, of a pre-Islamic cultural item helping to crystallize an expression of Islamic culture in which both Muslims and Christians cheerfully participated.

While the 'consolation' literature certainly cannot be said to represent high philosophy, it does nevertheless constitute an interesting, if minor, occasion for the modern scholar to observe how Arabophone Christian intellectuals of the early Islamic period could take their cue from developments in the thought-world of Muslims to advance Christian thinking in the world of Islam. And, of course, Christian intellectuals were not the only ones to be attracted to the 'consolation' literature; Muslim writers too continued to contribute to the genre, most notably Ibn Sına/Avicenna (980–1037), but his is another story, for another commentator, on another day. The present purpose has been to show in a particular instance how Christian intellectuals, principally in the Church of the East, insinuated Christian thinking into the cultural world of the Muslims, taking advantage of the wide availability of a work of the ever popular 'Philosopher of the Arabs'.

[67] Naji al-Takriti, *Yaḥyā ibn ʿAdī, a critical edition and study*, 222.

[68] On the popularity of the Alexander Romance see Stephen Gero, 'The Alexander legend in Byzantium: some literary gleanings', in 'Homo Byzantinus; Papers in honor of Alexander Kazhdan', eds A. Cutler and S. Franklin, *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 46 (1992), 83–7; *idem*, 'The legend of Alexander the Great in the Christian orient', *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester*, 75 (1993), 1–9.

From Aramaic to Arabic: The Languages of the Monasteries of Palestine in the Byzantine and Early Islamic Periods

While the monastic communities of the Holy Land were famously cosmopolitan and multilingual in the Byzantine and early Islamic periods, there can be no doubt that Greek was the dominant language of the ecclesiastical culture there from the fourth century until well into the eighth century and beyond. In fact, as Cyril Mango has written, "the most active centre of Greek culture in the 8th century lay in Palestine, notably in Jerusalem and the neighboring monasteries."[1] But alongside of Greek, and in addition to the other languages brought from abroad by monks and pilgrims, the indigenous languages of Syria/Palestine also flourished in this monastic milieu. These were principally Aramaic and Arabic. After the eighth century, in these same monastic communities, Greek underwent a declension in currency as the preferred idiom of the ecclesiastical culture of Palestine, although it is probably an exaggeration to say without qualification, as Mango does, that "in the course of the 9th century the practice of Greek all but died out in Palestine and Syria."[2] The fact is that Hellenism remained an important defining characteristic of the theological matrix from which the local Aramaic- and Arabic-speaking Christian community took its sense of socio-confessional identity in the eighth and ninth centuries and beyond.[3] But even in the fifth and sixth centuries, the formative period of Palestinian ecclesiastical culture, albeit that Greek was the dominant language, it was far from being the only idiom of Christian culture in the Holy Land, even in the monastic establishment, which in those days, particularly in the century or so that elapsed between the council of Chalcedon in 451 and the council of Constantinople II

[1] C. Mango, "Greek Culture in Palestine after the Arab Conquest," in *Scritture, libri e testi nelle aree provinciali di Bisanzio,* ed. G. Cavallo et al., I (Spoleto, 1991), 149–50. See also R. P. Blake, "La littérature grecque en Palestine au VIIIe siècle," *Le Muséon* 78 (1965), 367–80, who spoke of a "sudden awakening" (p. 369) at this time in Mar Sabas. Siméon Vailhé wrote that "the eighth and ninth centuries were the golden age of Sabaïte literature," in his article, "Les écrivains de Mar-Saba," *EO* 2 (1898–99), 33.

[2] Mango, "Greek Culture in Palestine," 151.

[3] See A. Cameron, "The Eastern Provinces in the 7th Century A.D.: Hellenism and the Emergence of Islam," in ʼΕΛΛΗΝΙΣΜΟΣ: *Quelques jalons pour un histoire de l'identité grecque, Actes du Colloque de Strasbourg, 25–27 octobre 1989,* ed. S. Said (Leiden, 1991), 287–313.

in 553, was in the process of becoming the arbiter of orthodoxy not only in Jerusalem but in the empire.[4]

This study explores the fortunes of Aramaic and Arabic in the monastic communities of Palestine in the Byzantine and early Islamic periods. What one hopes to show is that these indigenous languages had an important role to play in the promotion generally of the spiritual power and authority of the patriarchate of Jerusalem, the "mother of all the churches," as Cyril of Scythopolis loved to call it.[5] The inquiry unfolds in three steps: a discussion of language and theology in the monasteries in the crucial period of the Christological controversies of the sixth century; the monastic cultivation of Christian Palestinian Aramaic, largely for the purpose of meeting the pastoral needs of the indigenous Christians to whom the monks often ministered; and the turn to Arabic in the eighth century as the Melkite church consolidated its identity in the world of Islam. A brief appendix discusses the importance of Armenian and Georgian in the monasteries of Palestine in the period under discussion.

I. Language and Orthodox Theology

Almost from the beginning Judean desert monasticism drew a multilingual clientele from several parts of the empire. Of the seven notable monks whose stories Cyril of Scythopolis tells in his *Lives of the Monks of Palestine,* not one of them was a native Palestinian; all had come to the Holy Land on pilgrimage, and all had stayed on to become founders or members of one or another of the monastic communities. The story was the same with other notable monks of the desert, such as Chariton, the father of Judean desert monasticism,[6] Gerasimus,[7] George of Choziba,[8] and even John Moschus.[9] The desert monasteries were closely tied to the *loca sancta* and pilgrimage to the Holy City; pilgrims came from all over the empire.[10] Typical of what the hagiographers would say of the advent of one of their subjects to monastic life in the desert is what Cyril of Scythopolis said of Euthymius (377–473): "Led by the Holy Spirit, [Euthymius] came to Jerusalem in the twenty-ninth year of his life. After he had venerated the holy Cross, the church

[4]See the important study of L. Perrone, *La Chiesa di Palestina e le controversie cristologiche: Dal concilio de Efeso (431) al secondo concilio di Costantinopoli (553),* Testi e ricerche di scienze religiose 18 (Brescia, 1980).

[5]See, e.g., the phrase as it appears in Cyril's presentation of Sabas' letter to Emperor Anastasius in E. Schwartz, *Kyrillos von Skythopolis,* 2 vols. (Leipzig, 1939), I, 155. Cyril, and Sabas, presumably borrowed this phrase from Jerusalem's liturgy of St. James. See R. L. Wilken, *The Land Called Holy: Palestine in Christian History and Thought* (New Haven, Conn., 1992), 171.

[6]See G. Garitte, "La Vie prémétaphrastique de s. Chariton," *Bulletin de l'Institut historique belge de Rome* 21 (1941), 5–46; L. Di Segni, "The Life of Chariton," in *Ascetic Behavior in Greco-Roman Antiquity: A Sourcebook,* ed. V. L. Wimbush (Minneapolis, 1990), 393–421; L. Campagnano Di Segni, *Cercare Dio nel deserto: Vita di Caritone* (Magnano, 1990).

[7]See H. Grégoire, "La Vie anonyme de s. Gérasime," *BZ* 13 (1904), 119–35; L. Campagnano Di Segni, *Nel deserto accanto ai fratelli: Vite di Gerasimo e di Giorgio di Choziba* (Magnano, 1991).

[8]See C. House, "Vita sancti Georgii Chozibitae auctore Antonio Chozibita," *AB* 7 (1888), 95–144, 336–59; T. Vivian and A. N. Athanassakis, *The Life of Saint George of Choziba and the Miracles of the Most Holy Mother of God at Choziba by Anthony of Choziba* (San Francisco-London, 1994).

[9]See the text of the *Pratum Spirituale* in PG 87, cols. 2851–3112. See also *The Spiritual Meadow of John Moschus,* trans. J. Wortley, Cistercian Studies 139 (Kalamazoo, Mich., 1992).

[10]See J. Wilkinson, *Jerusalem Pilgrims before the Crusades* (Warminster, 1977); E. D. Hunt, *Holy Land Pilgrimages in the Later Roman Empire, A.D. 312–460* (Oxford, 1982).

of the holy Resurrection and the other venerable places, and also visited the inspired fathers in the desert, . . . he came to the *laura* of Pharan."[11] Future monks of whom Cyril speaks came in this way from Cappadocia, Armenia, Syria, Greece, Byzantium, Bithynia, Galatia, Ethiopia, and Arabia, as well as from Jericho, Bethlehem, Scythopolis, Hebron, and Jerusalem itself.

In the monasteries the language of worship and theology was generally Greek, but there is ample evidence that when there were monks from another particular language community in a sufficient number to make it practicable, services in their own language could be arranged. So it was that in Theodosius' monastery, for example, worship could be conducted in Armenian, Greek, and Bessan, according to Theodosius' biographer, Theodore of Petra.[12] And Cyril of Scythopolis himself tells of the Armenians in Sabas' monastery that Sabas told them "to perform the office of psalmody in Armenian in the little oratory on Saturdays and Sundays."[13] Subsequently, when Sabas had completed the construction of the new church in the Great Laura, he moved the Armenians. Cyril describes Sabas' move as follows:

> He then transferred the Armenians from the little oratory to performing the office of psalmody in the Armenian language in the church built by God, telling them to recite the Gospel and the rest of the sequence in the office on their own in Armenian and then join the Greek-speakers at the time of the holy sacrifice in order to partake of the divine mysteries. But when some of them tried to recite the Trishagion hymn with the addition "who was crucified for us" concocted by Peter nicknamed the Fuller, the godly man was rightly indignant and ordered them to chant this hymn in Greek according to the ancient tradition of the catholic Church and not according to the innovation of the said Peter, who had shared the opinions of Eutyches.[14]

What is clear from this passage is the acceptability of languages other than Greek in the Judean desert monasteries, even in portions of the divine liturgy. Equally clear, however, is the dominant and theologically determining role of Greek, especially in support of Chalcedonian orthodoxy. In particular, Cyril makes it clear that Sabas was concerned about the subtle influence of Monophysitism in the liturgy in the form of the expanded liturgical formula of the Trishagion as it was chanted in Armenian. The Armenian practice mirrored that of the Jacobite liturgy in Syriac. Although Peter the Fuller's (d. 488) addition to the Trishagion must have originally been in Greek (ὁ σταυρωθεὶς δι' ἡμᾶς), in the Syriac-speaking communities there is sufficient evidence to suggest that the addition to the formula in that language was for a time common to both Jacobites and Chalcedonians.[15] Nevertheless, as the Christological controversies developed in the fifth, sixth, and

[11]Schwartz, *Kyrillos von Skythopolis,* I, 14. The English translation is that of R. M. Price, *Cyril of Scythopolis: The Lives of the Monks of Palestine,* Cistercian Studies 114 (Kalamazoo, Mich., 1991), 9.

[12]See Price, *Cyril of Scythopolis,* 211 n. 25. Cf. H. Usener, *Der heilige Theodosius* (Leipzig, 1890; repr. Hildesheim, 1975), 45.

[13]Schwartz, *Kyrillos von Skythopolis,* I, 105; Price, *Cyril of Scythopolis,* 114.

[14]Schwartz, *Kyrillos von Skythopolis,* I, 117–18; Price, *Cyril of Scythopolis,* 126–27.

[15]It is clear in the Syriac texts emanating from the theological controversies of the 7th century that Monothelete Chalcedonians, along with the Jacobites in the Syriac-speaking milieu, used the addition to the Trishagion. See S. Brock, "A Syriac Fragment on the Sixth Council," *OC* 57 (1973), 63–71; and idem, "An Early Syriac Life of Maximus the Confessor," *AB* 91 (1973), 299–346, both reprinted in S. Brock, *Syriac Perspectives on Late Antiquity* (London, 1984). See also S. Brock, "A Monothelete Florilegium in Syriac," in *After Chalcedon: Studies in Theology and Church History Offered to Professor Albert Van Roey,* ed. C. Laga et al., Orientalia Lovanien-

seventh centuries, the formula of the Trishagion used in the liturgy came more and more to signify ecclesiastical allegiance: Monophysites used the addition; Chalcedonians did not.[16] So in the Great Laura in the year 501, the year when Sabas transferred the Armenians to the "church built by God,"[17] and "some of them tried to recite the Trishagion hymn with the addition 'who was crucified for us,'" Sabas immediately suspected the irruption of Monophysitism in his monastery. It was at a time in the reign of Emperor Anastasius I (491–518) when Monophysitism was in the ascendancy in imperial circles and the battle was on for the allegiance of the monks, not least in the Holy Land. Sabas, of course, following the lead of his master Euthymius, was staunchly Chalcedonian. He was in fact to become the champion of the Chalcedonian cause, not just in Jerusalem, but even in the courts of Anastasius I and of Justinian I (527–565) in Constantinople, in 511/512 and 531 respectively.[18]

Sabas' insistence that the monks sing the Trishagion in Greek due to the fear that the Monophysite formula might otherwise be sung unnoticed in Armenian reminds the reader of Cyril of Scythopolis' *Lives of the Monks of Palestine* of the role that languages such as Armenian and Syriac, not to mention Coptic, played in the Christological controversies of the sixth and following centuries. It certainly came about in later times, after Constantinople II in 553, and particularly after Constantinople III in 680/681, that Syriac, Coptic, and Armenian increasingly were the languages most often used by Jacobites. But it is important to emphasize the fact that in the first two decades of the sixth century in Syria/Palestine the Christological controversies as they engaged Sabas and the monks of the Judean desert and elsewhere were largely conducted in Greek on all sides. To make this point one has only to mention the names of the principal Monophysite figures of the day, men such as Severus of Antioch (ca. 465–538, patriarch in 512–518), John Rufus (fl. ca. 515), Zacharias Rhetor (d. after 536), Julian of Halicarnassus (d. ca. 527), and the author of the *Life of Peter the Iberian*. While they all wrote works now preserved almost entirely in Syriac, it is nevertheless also true that they all wrote them originally in Greek.[19] Even the Syriac writers of the period, men such as Jacob of Sarug (ca. 451–521) or Philoxenus of Mabbug (Hierapolis) (ca. 440–523), who wrote only in Syriac, were well aware that they were participating in an argument being conducted largely in Greek.[20] Cyril of Scythopolis mentions Philoxenus twice as one "who had been signal in anathematizing the dogmatic decree of Chalcedon and embracing Eutyches and Dioscorus and their heresy,"[21] without any indication that he was a Syriac-speaker who wrote

sia Analecta 18 (Louvain, 1985), 35–45; and idem, "Two Sets of Monothelete Questions to the Maximianists," *OLP* 17 (1986), 119–40, both reprinted in S. Brock, *Studies in Syriac Christianity* (London, 1992).

[16]See V. S. Janeras, "Les byzantins et le trishagion christologique," in *Miscellanea Liturgica in onore di sua eminenza il cardinale Giacomo Lercaro*, 2 vols. (Rome, 1967), II, 469–99.

[17]On the churches in the Great Laura, see J. Patrich, *Sabas, Leader of Palestinian Monasticism: A Comparative Study in Eastern Monasticism, Fourth to Seventh Centuries,* DOS 32 (Washington, D.C., 1995), 69–76.

[18]See the discussion in Patrich, *Sabas,* 311–19.

[19]For the details regarding the works and careers of these Monophysite thinkers, see W. H. C. Frend, *The Rise of the Monophysite Movement: Chapters in the History of the Church in the Fifth and Sixth Centuries* (Cambridge, 1972).

[20]See A. De Halleux, *Philoxène de Mabbog, sa vie, ses écrits, sa théologie* (Louvain, 1963); R. Chesnut, *Three Monophysite Christologies* (Oxford, 1977).

[21]See Schwartz, *Kyrillos von Skythopolis,* I, 141, see also 148; Price, *Cyril of Scythopolis,* 151.

not a word in Greek. Therefore, the fact that Greek was the language of theology and of liturgical worship in the monasteries of the Judean desert does not of itself explain how it came about that the monastic establishment there became the leading proponent of Chalcedonian orthodoxy in the sixth and succeeding centuries. As a matter of fact, until the day in the year 456 when Empress Eudocia was reconciled with Patriarch Juvenal of Jerusalem (422–458) due to the influence of Euthymius, and again in 482, according to Cyril, when a large number of *Aposchist* monks, as he called the Monophysites, were reconciled with Patriarch Martyrius (478–486), almost the whole monastic establishment in Palestine had been Monophysite sympathizers. It took from then until well into the sixth century to secure their full allegiance to the teaching of Chalcedon. The event that most evidently symbolizes the firm Chalcedonian allegiance of the monks of the Judean desert is the occasion in the year 516 when the archimandrites Sabas and Theodosius flanked Patriarch John III (516–524) in the pulpit of St. Stephen's Basilica in Jerusalem and the three of them, supported by a mass demonstration of ten thousand monks, according to the hagiographer, formally repudiated the wishes of Emperor Anastasius by anathematizing anyone who would not accept the teaching of the council of Chalcedon.[22]

Once loyalty to Chalcedon was firmly established in the patriarchate of Jerusalem in the sixth century, due in large part to the insistence of the monastic establishment under the leadership of Sabas and the Sabaïte communities, and when the emperors Justin I (518–527) and Justinian I (527–565) made Chalcedonian orthodoxy the religious ideology of the empire, efforts were made, particularly in the Syriac-speaking areas of the patriarchate of Antioch, to institute a separate Monophysite hierarchy alongside the official Chalcedonian one. The role of Jacob Baradaeus (ca. 500–578) in this enterprise is well known, and it is after his name that the followers of the new hierarchs came to be called Jacobites.[23]

It is true, as John Binns has recently written, that "when the ordinations of Monophysite bishops and clergy began in the 540s, Palestine was unaffected."[24] He goes on to suggest that this was due in part to the internationalism of the monastic establishment in Jerusalem and in particular to what he perceives to have been a "steady decline in the use of Syriac in the church in Palestine" in the period after Chalcedon.[25] So convinced is he that what he calls "Syriac" had disappeared in Jerusalem, and that the monks spoke only Greek, with some occasional Armenian or Bessan, that he views as exceptional Cyril of Scythopolis' report about the monk Gabrielius that "being highly intelligent and also studious, he had learnt to speak and write accurately in Latin, Greek, and Syriac."[26] Gabrielius' accomplishments certainly were exceptional, but this fact says nothing about the currency of a language called "Syriac" in Palestine in the sixth century. Nevertheless, Binns says that "by the start of the sixth century, Sabas and Theodosius were making no provision for Syriac-speakers in the liturgical practice in their monasteries,"[27] and he

[22]See Schwartz, *Kyrillos von Skythopolis,* I, 148–52.

[23]The best discussion of this phenomenon remains E. Honigmann, *Evêques et évêchés monophysites d'Asie antérieure au VIe siècle* (Louvain, 1951). See also Frend, *The Rise of the Monophysite Movement,* esp. 255–95.

[24]J. Binns, *Ascetics and Ambassadors of Christ: The Monasteries of Palestine, 314–631* (Oxford, 1994), 190.

[25]Ibid., 194–95.

[26]Schwartz, *Kyrillos von Skythopolis,* I, 56; Price, *Cyril of Scythopolis,* 53.

[27]Binns, *Ascetics and Ambassadors,* 195.

even supposes that there were no Syriac-speakers in the Judean monastic communities at all in later centuries. To support this view he cites the provision in the later *Typicon of Mar Sabas* to the effect that no "Syrian" should be allowed to be the superior in the Sabaïte monasteries. But this very document, a product of the ninth century or later, in fact proves the opposite. One may cite two of its provisions to make the point. In the first place, the *Typicon* makes the same arrangement for "Syriac-speakers" as had earlier been made for Armenians and Bessans. The text says:

> The Iberians or the Syrians [or the Franks] shall not be permitted to conduct a complete prayer service in their churches, rather, they will gather to chant the liturgical hours and the daily canon and will read the (Epistles) of the Apostle and the Gospels in their own language, and afterwards they will come into the great church and participate in the pure, lifegiving Divine mysteries together with the entire brotherhood.[28]

Second, the very passage to which Binns refers, about no Syrian superiors, bespeaks their considerable presence. The text says:

> And since the destructive demons, on occasion of the appointment of the monastery leaders, are wont to cause dissensions and quarrels between the two nationalities, that is, the Greek-speakers and the Syriac-speakers, in order to remove this stumbling block, we establish that from now on none of the Syrians will be appointed to the post of abbot, whereas for stewards, hostelers, and the other jobs we order and agree that Syrians shall be given preference, because in their lands of origin people are more efficient and practical.[29]

The fact is, as Binns seems to be unaware, that there were those whom people called "Syriac-speaking" Chalcedonians in Palestine and elsewhere from the fifth century until well into later centuries,[30] when gradually, after the rise of Islam, both Greek and "Syriac" were eclipsed as day-to-day ecclesiastical languages by Arabic. Prior to the beginning of the ninth century there is every reason to believe that many of the "Syriac-speakers" in Palestine, especially those in the monastic communities, were bilingual, commanding both Greek and what many have come to call "Syriac." This circumstance might well explain why in the sixth century there were no special provisions for them in the liturgy on the order of those made for the Armenians and the Bessans. When similar provisions did appear later in the *Typicon of Mar Sabas*, after the ninth century, it was because by then Greek itself was fast becoming more or less just a liturgical language in much of the Melkite community, and not least in the monasteries of Palestine.[31]

II. Christian Palestinian Aramaic

Evidence for what the Greek texts call ἡ τῶν Σύρων φωνή in Palestine from the fourth century onward is abundant, and it is not confined, as Binns supposes, to the two in-

[28] Patrich, *Sabas*, 274. The translation is by Leah Di Segni on the basis of the text provided in E. Kurtz' review of A. Dmitrijevskij, *Die Klosterregeln des hl. Sabas* (Kiev, 1890), in *BZ* 3 (1894), 167–70.

[29] Patrich, *Sabas*, 275.

[30] See, e.g., the texts cited in note 15 above.

[31] On this topic see S. H. Griffith, "Greek into Arabic: Life and Letters in the Monasteries of Palestine in the 9th Century: The Example of the *Summa Theologiae Arabica*," *Byzantion* 56 (1986), 117–38; and idem, "The Monks of Palestine and the Growth of Christian Literature in Arabic," *The Muslim World* 78 (1988), 1–28, both reprinted in S. H. Griffith, *Arabic Christianity in the Monasteries of Ninth-Century Palestine* (London, 1992).

stances cited by A. H. M. Jones in his influential article of 1959, "Were Ancient Heresies National or Social Movements in Disguise?"[32] Jones had mentioned passages in Eusebius' *Martyrs of Palestine* and in Mark the Deacon's *Vita Porphyrii* that could serve as evidence for what he called "Syriac-speaking" townsfolk in Scythopolis and Gaza respectively in the early fourth century.[33] In response, Binns cites a passage from the travel diary of Egeria (ca. 384), which, he argues, is evidence of a steady decline in the use of Syriac in the church in Palestine beginning already in the late fourth century. It is worth quoting the passage from Egeria in full because it can be seen more as evidence of what would become a common pattern in Palestine rather than as evidence of the decline of the so-called Syriac language. She said, about her visit to the Anastasis in Jerusalem:

> In this province there are some people who know both Greek and Syriac (*siriste*), but others know only one or the other. The bishop may know Syriac, but he never uses it. He always speaks in Greek, and has a presbyter beside him who translates the Greek into Syriac, so that everyone can understand what he means. Similarly, the lessons read in church have to be read in Greek, but there is always someone in attendance to translate into Syriac so that the people understand. Of course there are also people here who speak neither Greek nor Syriac, but Latin. But there is no need for them to be discouraged, since some of the brothers or sisters who speak Latin as well as Greek will explain things to them. And what I admire and value most is that all the hymns and antiphons and readings they have, and all the prayers the bishop says, are always relevant to the day which is being observed and to the place in which they are used. They never fail to be appropriate.[34]

The most straightforward construction to put upon the information contained in this passage, which clearly envisions a pilgrimage context, is that in the environs of Jerusalem people in the late fourth century generally spoke either Greek or what Egeria calls "Syriac," or both, but Greek predominated in official circles and at the liturgy.

What Egeria called "Syriac" and what Eusebius and Mark the Deacon called "the language of the Syrians" is undoubtedly the language that even some modern writers still call "Palestinian Syriac," although there is a fast developing consensus among current scholars to call it simply "Christian Palestinian Aramaic" (CPA), albeit that one recent writer proposes to call it "Melkite Aramaic."[35] It was the Aramaic language of the indigenous Christians of the Holy Land, written in a script closely related to the *Estrangelo* writing of Syriac properly so-called, the Aramaic dialect that flourished in the vast territories of the patriarchate of Antioch stretching from the eastern coast of the Mediterranean eastward along the silk routes as far as China.[36]

[32] A. H. M. Jones, "Were Ancient Heresies National or Social Movements in Disguise?" *JTS* 10 (1959), 280–98, esp. 290–92.

[33] Eusebius said that the future martyr Procopius (d. 303) in Scythopolis was a reader of the scriptures, a translator into "Syriac," and an exorcist. See G. Garitte, "Version géorgienne de la passion de s. Procope par Eusèbe," *Le Muséon* 66 (1953), 255. Mark the Deacon said that a local woman in Gaza told Porphyrius that her people had never learned Greek and knew only Syriac. See H. Grégoire and M. A. Kugener, *Marc le diacre, Vie de Porphyre évêque de Gaza* (Paris, 1930), 52–55.

[34] J. Wilkinson, *Egeria's Travels to the Holy Land*, rev. ed. (Jerusalem-Warminster, 1981), 146.

[35] See A. Desreumaux, "La naissance d'une nouvelle écriture araméenne à l'époque byzantine," *Semitica* 37 (1987), 107.

[36] For a popular account of the spread of Syriac-speaking Christianity eastwards, see S. H. Moffett, *A History of Christianity in Asia*, I: *Beginnings to 1500* (San Francisco, 1992).

The earliest piece of actual Christian Palestinian Aramaic writing so far to come to light is an inscription in a mosaic pavement, discovered in a church in 'Evron, north of Acre, which has been dated to A.D. 415.[37] In addition to inscriptions, a considerable archive of manuscripts in this language is known, particularly from the sixth to the eighth centuries, but including a number of texts from as late as the tenth to the thirteenth centuries.[38] The majority of the surviving manuscripts contain translations of portions of the Old and New Testaments, as well as translations of saints' lives, and patristic and liturgical texts. On the basis of the distribution of the inscriptions, one recent scholar judges that the CPA-speaking population was distributed mainly in the area of Jerusalem, the Judean desert, Transjordan, and western Galilee.[39] Presumably these people were for the most part the indigenous Christians of the Holy Land; many of them may also have been Greek-speaking.[40] That they were to be found in the monastic communities of the desert as well is clear from the fact that so-called Palestinian Syriac inscriptions have been found, among other locations, in the Sabaïte laura of Firminus, a foundation of the early sixth century (A.D. 515),[41] and manuscript fragments have been recovered from the ruins of Castellion, Khirbet al-Mird, another Sabaïte establishment of the year 492,[42] as well as in the monastery of al-Quwaysmah, not far from Amman in Jordan.[43]

There are a number of theories about the origins of Christian Palestinian Aramaic and its script. Here is not the place to go into them in detail. Suffice it first of all to say that it is a distinctive language in its own right, belonging to the group of West Aramaic languages that includes Jewish Palestinian Aramaic, Galilean Aramaic, and Samaritan Aramaic. While it shares many features with Syriac, most notably its script, one must emphasize that it is a different language, as recent detailed grammatical and syntactical studies have clearly shown.[44] It flourished as a spoken language at least from the fourth

[37] See A. Jacques, "A Palestinian Syriac Inscription in the Mosaic Pavement at Evron," *Eretz-Israel* 19 (1986), 54–56. See also V. Tzaferis, "The Greek Inscriptions from the Early Christian Church at Evron," *Eretz-Israel* 19 (1986), 36–51.

[38] See J. Barclay, "Melkite Orthodox Syro-Byzantine Manuscripts in Syriac and Palestinian Aramaic," *Lib.ann* 21 (1971), 205–19; M. Bar-Asher, "Palestinian Syriac Studies: Source Texts, Traditions, and Grammatical Problems in Palestinian Syriac" (Ph.D. diss., Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1976, in Hebrew); C. Müller-Kessler, *Grammatik des christlich-palästinisch-Aramäischen*, pt. 1, Texte und Studien zur Orientalistik 6 (Hildesheim, 1991), 9–26. See also K. Beyer, "Die Aussprache des christlich-palästinischen Aramäisch: Zur neuen Grammatik von Christa Müller-Kessler," *Journal of Semitic Studies* 40 (1995), 241–57.

[39] See M. Levy-Rubin, "Society, Language, and Culture in the Patriarchate of Jerusalem during the Late Byzantine and Early Islamic Period: Leadership versus Community," paper presented at the Fourth Workshop on Late Antiquity and Early Islam, "Patterns of Communal Identity in the Late Antique and Early Islamic Near East," London, the Wellcome Trust, 5–7 May 1994, forthcoming. See also eadem, "The Patriarchate of Jerusalem after the Arab Conquest" (Ph.D. diss., Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1994, in Hebrew), 268–90.

[40] In the *Pratum Spirituale* of John Moschus there is a story of one of several "Saracen" raiders who spoke to Abba Jordanes in Greek (Ἑλληνιστί). See PG 87, chap. 155, col. 3024B; Wortley, *The Spiritual Meadow*, 129.

[41] See A. Desreumaux et al., "Chronique archéologique: Le laure de Saint Firmin," *RevBibl* 75 (1978), 417–19; J. Patrich and R. Rubin, "Les grottes de el-'Aleliyat et la laure de saint Firmin," *RevBibl* 91 (1984), 381–87. See also Patrich, *Sabas*, 117–18.

[42] See C. Perrot, "Un fragment christo-palestinien découvert à Khirbet Mird," *RevBibl* 70 (1963), 506–55; J.-T. Milik, "The Monastery of Kastellion," *Biblica* 42 (1961), 21–27; M. Baillet, "Un livret magique en christo-palestinien à l'Université de Louvain," *Le Muséon* 76 (1963), 375–401. See also Patrich, *Sabas*, 144–45.

[43] See E. Puech, "L'inscription christo-palestinienne du monastère d'el-Quweisme," *Lib.ann* 34 (1984), 341–46.

[44] See M. Bar-Asher, "Le syro-palestinien: Études grammaticales," *JA* 276 (1988), 27–59; C. Müller-Kessler, "Die Überlieferungsstufen des christlich-palästinischen Aramäisch," in *XXIV. deutscher Orientalistentag, vom 26.*

through the eighth centuries, with a distinctive, if borrowed, script of its own at least from the fifth century onward. By the eleventh and twelfth centuries, the period from which the latest texts come, it had become merely a liturgical language, which, to judge by the prescriptions allowing liturgical lessons in "Syriac" in the *Typicon of Mar Sabas*, nevertheless still had its place in Palestinian monastic life.

The largest majority of the 110 CPA manuscripts known to have survived to modern times, eighty-three of them, come from the period between the sixth and eighth centuries,[45] the period during which the language flourished in everyday speech. And although it was the language largely of the rural population outside the major cities of Palestine, and of the non-Greek-speakers in the urban areas, the manuscripts have been preserved in monastic collections, largely the library of St. Catherine's monastery in Sinai, the repository of many of the manuscripts written originally in the monasteries of the Judean desert in Greek, CPA, Syriac, and Arabic. Most of the CPA manuscripts survive only partially, and many of them are palimpsests, testifying to the eclipse of the spoken language from the ninth century onward. Due to the fragmentary state of the remains, and the scarcity of colophons, it is difficult to know exactly where the texts were actually written and copied in the first place. It is not unreasonable to suppose, as most scholars do, that they were products of the Judean desert monastic communities. They are almost all translations from Greek originals; there seem to be no original CPA compositions among them. All of them are Chalcedonian in their theological persuasion. Presumably they would have served the needs not only of CPA-speaking monks, but of those local persons with whom the monks were in a daily pastoral relationship.[46] Indeed, it seems not unreasonable to suggest that Syriac-speaking monks were the ones who adapted the *Estrangelo* script of Syriac to the requirements of CPA.[47]

One knows that there were Syriac-speaking monks in the desert monastic communities. There is the example of the trilingual monk Gabrielius mentioned above. Cyril of Scythopolis says that Gabrielius, and his three brothers who came to Euthymius' monastery, were "of Cappadocian origin and Syrian rearing."[48] The five pioneering monks at the site that would become the monastery of Choziba were all Syrians, as Anthony of Choziba testifies.[49] There are some Syriac inscriptions in Palestinian monastic environs.[50]

bis. 30 September 1988 in Köln: ausgewählte Vorträge, ed. W. Diem and A. Falaturi, *ZDMG*, suppl. 8 (Stuttgart, 1990), 55–60.

[45] See Bar-Asher, "Le syro-palestinien," 33.

[46] In the *Pratum Spirituale* of John Moschus there is the story of a "Saracen" woman, who was a Christian, whose destitution drove her to offer herself unclothed to Abba Sisinios. The text says he spoke to her "in Hebrew (Ἑβραϊστί)." See PG 87, col. 2999B; Wortley, *The Spiritual Meadow*, 112. Some translators have simply rendered the term as "Syriac." See, e.g., M.-J. Rouet de Journal, *Jean Moschus, Le pré spirituel*, SC 12 (Paris, 1946), 187. It seems probable that John Moschus knew that the local Christians spoke a language closely related to that of the local Jews (Jewish Palestinian Aramaic) and that Abba Sisinios actually spoke to the woman in Christian Palestinian Aramaic.

[47] See Desreumaux, "La naissance d'une nouvelle écriture," 106.

[48] Schwartz, *Kyrillos von Skythopolis*, I, 25; Price, *Cyril of Scythopolis*, 21.

[49] See House, "Vita sancti Georgii Chozibitae"; idem, "Miracula beatae virginis Mariae in Choziba," *AB* 7 (1888), 360–70; idem, "Nota in Vitam sancti Georgii Chozibitae," *AB* 8 (1889), 209–10. An English translation of these texts is in Vivian and Athanassakis, *The Life of Saint George of Choziba*.

[50] See S. Brock, "Syriac Inscriptions: A Preliminary Check List of European Publications," *Journal of the Syriac Academy* 4 (1978), 290–312, also published in *Annali dell'Istituto Orientale di Napoli* 38 (1978), 255–71, and reprinted in Brock, *Studies in Syriac Christianity*.

There were Syriac manuscripts in the monastic libraries.[51] And during the controversies with the Monophysites, parties in Palestine did not hesitate to make contact with monks in Syria. In this connection, one might mention an incident that Cyril of Scythopolis records, according to which Empress Eudocia sent a message to no less a personage in Syria than Simeon Stylites to advise her on her doctrinal allegiance; he told her to follow the teaching and guidance of Euthymius.[52] In the late eighth century, two monks of Mar Sabas monastery, Patricius and Abramius by name, translated the ascetical homilies of Isaac the Syrian, also known as Isaac of Nineveh (fl. after 650), from Syriac into Greek.[53] In the ninth century, Theodore Abū Qurrah, one of the earliest monks of Mar Sabas regularly to write in Arabic, also, on his own testimony, wrote some thirty tracts against the Jacobites in Syriac.[54] Yet it remains true that Syriac properly so-called did have a low profile in the monasteries of the desert of Judah in the fifth and sixth centuries, to judge by the scarcity of the written remains of it that have come down to us. It is hard to avoid the conclusion that the Christological controversies of that time, during which Syriac came to be the de facto language of most Jacobites and Nestorians, had something to do with its small showing in the monasteries of Palestine.[55] But there was an ample presence of Christian Palestinian Aramaic there. Although it was a different dialect of Aramaic than was Syriac, its currency in the monastic milieu may well have sufficed for the speakers of Aramaic.

The recognition of the currency of CPA in the Judean desert monastic communities from the fifth through the eighth centuries will also go a long way toward explaining how the monks communicated with the numerous local people with whom they were involved. Not least among them were those whom Cyril of Scythopolis mentions more than fifteen times under the name οἱ Σαρακηνοί, or "the wolves of Arabia,"[56] as he also calls them in one place. He sometimes uses the term ὁ βάρβαρος interchangeably with the term ὁ Σαρακηνός.[57] When, as a result of the ministry of the monks, in particular "the miracle-working Euthymius," some Saracens became Christians, Cyril says of them that they are "no longer Hagarenes and Ishmaelites, but now descendants of Sarah and heirs of the promise."[58] It is clear from Cyril's accounts that the monks were in regular contact with both "Saracens" and other Palestinians who would have known very little if any

[51] For example, the lower two layers of a quintuple palimpsest found at Sinai contain Syriac texts of the Peshitta. See A. S. Atiya, *The Arabic Manuscripts of Mount Sinai: A Hand-List of the Arabic Manuscripts and Scrolls Microfilmed at the Library of the Monastery of St. Catherine, Mount Sinai* (Baltimore, 1955), 19. Note also pls. II–V, showing the Syriac, Greek, and Kufic palimpsests. See also H. Husmann, "Die syrischen Handschriften des Sinai-Klosters: Herkunft und Schreiber," *OKS* 24 (1975), 281–308. Most of the MSS listed here were copied by known copyists, named in the colophons, from the 13th century. Presumably they worked from earlier materials. One knows there were Syriac MSS in Mar Sabas monastery in the 8th century from the testimony included in a MS containing a text by Isaac the Syrian, written in the monastery. See F. Nau, "Analyse du manuscrit syriaque de Paris, no. 378 de la Bibliothèque Nationale," *ROC* 27 (1929–30), 411–15.

[52] See Schwartz, *Kyrillos von Skythopolis*, I, 47–48.

[53] See [D. Miller], *The Ascetical Homilies of Saint Isaac the Syrian* (Boston, 1984), lxxxv–lxxxvi.

[54] See C. Bacha, *The Mīmars of Theodorus Abū Qurrah, Bishop of Ḥarrān, the Earliest Christian Arabic Writer* (Beirut, 1904; in Arabic), 60–61.

[55] See the remarks of Paul Peeters, *Le tréfonds oriental de l'hagiographie byzantine* (Brussels, 1950), appendix, "Traductions et traducteurs dans l'hagiographie orientale à l'époque byzantine," 175–83.

[56] Schwartz, *Kyrillos von Skythopolis*, I, 24; Price, *Cyril of Scythopolis*, 20.

[57] See, e.g., Schwartz, *Kyrillos von Skythopolis*, I, 186.

[58] Schwartz, *Kyrillos von Skythopolis*, I, 21; Price, *Cyril of Scythopolis*, 16.

Greek. This situation posed a problem for John Binns. In *Ascetics and Ambassadors of Christ*, he writes: "The relationship between the monks and the Arabs raises the question of the language used. The monks spoke Greek, and while they also used their native languages of Armenian, Bessan, or some other language, they were not reputed for their linguistic ability. . . . Arab nomads did not speak Greek, according to information provided by Theodoret. . . . This lack of a common language must have complicated the catechetical process."[59]

But there was no "lack of a common language." Arabic aside, there was the common idiom of Christian Palestinian Aramaic, the very language that, under the name of "Syriac," Binns was in such a hurry to banish from the monasteries. The language flourished in Palestine and Jordan, and in the monastic communities, precisely during the period between the fifth and the seventh centuries. What is more, it was, according to the findings of the current authorities, M. Bar-Asher, A. Desreumaux, and C. Müller-Kessler, very much the language that developed locally from the old Aramaic dialect of the rural and nomadic groups of Galilee, Transjordan, and what Bar-Asher calls "a radius of 30 to 40 kilometres around the city [of Jerusalem]."[60] No doubt there was also a currency of Arabic in this milieu in the fifth and sixth centuries, primarily among those whom Cyril calls "Saracens."[61] But Arabic in no way infringes on the communicability of CPA; bilingualism had long been a feature of the lives of the nomadic and the settled Arabs in those territories in which both Aramaic and Arabic were current and intermingled. Indeed there is evidence of a considerable influence of Arabic on CPA, especially in the latter period of its currency as a liturgical language.[62]

As for the Christological controversies that played such a determining role in the schism of the oriental churches in the sixth century, and that would continue to engage the talents of writers in Greek, Syriac, and Arabic for centuries to come, there is no evidence that language was a decisive factor in a given population's choice of a doctrinal or a hierarchical allegiance. The Chalcedonian faith of the monks of the Judean desert was certainly loudly proclaimed in all three languages and not least in CPA.

John Binns, one will recall, posits a decline of "Syriac" in Palestine as one of the significant factors in the choice of Chalcedonian allegiance in Jerusalem. He then assigns three reasons for the adoption of Chalcedonian orthodoxy in the monastic establishment: "the geography of the desert, the internationalism of the community, and the devotion to the Holy Places." He says that these factors were "unique to Palestine and had a decisive influence on the course of the controversy."[63] While there can be no doubt that these factors were important dimensions of the Palestinian monastic experience, one may hesitate to conclude that they had so much to do with the option for Chalcedon. If one must find a sociohistorical cause for the espousal of Chalcedonian orthodoxy, or a sine qua non condition to explain it, apart from the conviction on the part of Euthymius and his followers that it was the truth, Cyril of Scythopolis' *Lives of the Monks of Palestine* sug-

[59] Binns, *Ascetics and Ambassadors of Christ*, 114.

[60] Bar-Asher, "Le syro-palestinien," 29.

[61] On this subject, see the important work of Irfan Shahîd, *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Fifth Century* (Washington, D.C., 1989); idem, *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Sixth Century* (Washington, D.C., 1994).

[62] See Müller-Kessler, "Die Überlieferungsstufen," 60.

[63] Binns, *Ascetics and Ambassadors of Christ*, 199.

gests that the requisite condition was the perception on the part of the monks that the faith of Chalcedon was miraculously warranted and that it would have been the choice of the ancient fathers of monasticism. In other words, the determining factor was the widespread acceptance of the authority of the "holy man," almost in the Peter Brown sense of the term,[64] and the personal charisma of Euthymius and Sabas. It would have been as Sabas himself reportedly said to Emperor Anastasius about the patriarch of Jerusalem Elias I (494–516) and his loyalty to Chalcedon: "May Your Serenity rest fully assured that the archbishop of our holy city of God, educated in the doctrines of piety by the ancient luminaries and miracle-working fathers of our desert, rejects equally both Nestorius' division and Eutyches' confusion and, following the middle road of the orthodox Church, allows deviation, . . . neither to the right nor to the left."[65]

The operative phrase in this paragraph is "educated in the doctrines of piety by the . . . miracle-working fathers of our desert." For in Jerusalem, it is thus clear, orthodoxy was determined not so much by the bishop but by the allegiance of the monastic establishment, where the authority was not that of jurisdiction but that of the evidentiary miracle. Bernard Flusin has studied in detail the centrality of the miraculous in Cyril's *Lives*.[66] But the purpose of the literary prominence of the miracle in the *Lives* is not just to commend the primacy of the monastic establishment of the Judean desert and of Jerusalem, as virtually the center of the church of the empire, the church of Justinian, as Flusin seems to imply. Rather, Cyril's ultimate purpose was to commend the Neo-Chalcedonian orthodoxy of the Sabaïte establishment, and of the Jerusalem church, as I argue elsewhere,[67] particularly in the context of the struggle with the Jacobites, whom Cyril regularly calls *Aposchists*. In the sixth century this was largely a monastic struggle, and the monks on both sides carried the bishops with them rather than vice versa. This is often a forgotten, or at least a not-often-mentioned, aspect of Cyril's *Lives*.[68] It is not for nothing that he calls Sabas "the advocate of orthodoxy and accuser of heresy."[69] And the dispute was not only over Christology. Origenism, as a monastic heresy in Cyril's eyes, was also an issue between Palestinian and Syrian monks; Philoxenus of Mabbug, the Jacobite monk whom Cyril names twice in the *Lives*, was a passionate devotee of Evagrius of Pontus (d. 399),[70] whom Cyril names three times as an adversary. It is a mistake therefore to think that the Syriac-speaking monastic communities in the patriarchate of Antioch, as well as the Coptic-speaking monks of Egypt, were not part of the contemporary scenario within which one must read Cyril's *Lives*. The very internationalism of the Judean desert monastic establishment is what underlies its bid to be the spokesman for the orthodoxy of the empire. And orthodoxy on the popular level seems

[64]See the influential article by Peter Brown, "The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity," *JRS* 61 (1971), 80–101.

[65]Schwartz, *Kyrillos von Skythopolis*, I, 145; Price, *Cyril of Scythopolis*, 153–54.

[66]See B. Flusin, *Miracle et histoire dans l'oeuvre de Cyrill de Scythopolis* (Paris, 1983).

[67]See S. H. Griffith, "The Signs and Wonders of Orthodoxy: Miracles and Monks' Lives in Sixth-Century Palestine," forthcoming publication of the seminar on "Miracles" sponsored by the Seminar on Judaism and Early Christianity in the Department of Theology, the University of Notre Dame.

[68]See C. Stallman-Pacitti, *Cyril of Scythopolis: A Study in Hagiography as Apology* (Brookline, Mass., 1991).

[69]Schwartz, *Kyrillos von Skythopolis*, I, 158; Price, *Cyril of Scythopolis*, 167.

[70]See A. Guillaumont, *Les "Képhalaia Gnostica" d'Évagre le Pontique et l'histoire de l'origénisme chez les grecs et chez les syriens* (Paris, 1962), esp. 173–200, 205–14, 304–20. See also J. W. Watt, "Philoxenus and the Old Syriac Version of Evagrius' *Centuries*," *OC* 64 (1980), 65–81.

to have been discerned in the doctrinal allegiance of the holy men who in the sixth century can show themselves the most convincingly to be the heirs of Antony, Pachomius, Basil, and the holy monks celebrated by Palladius (ca. 365–425) and Theodoret of Cyrrhus (ca. 393–ca. 466). These were the sources and models for both the Chalcedonian Cyril of Scythopolis in his *Lives of the Monks of Palestine* and for the Jacobite John of Ephesus in his *Lives of the Eastern Saints*.[71] It is also why in the sixth century there was a massive effort to translate the classics of Egyptian desert spirituality into Syriac, so that the largely Jacobite, and even Nestorian, Syriac-speaking monks could lay claim to the mantle of monastic sanctity.[72]

As for the currency of Christian Palestinian Aramaic, the evidence suggests, as we have seen, that it flourished as a spoken and written language in Palestine and Transjordan until it gave way to Arabic in the eighth century, as the local idiom of the Melkite Christians. Thereafter it survived as a fading liturgical language in some places until the time of the Crusades. In its written form, CPA is undoubtedly the product of the monasteries, where the biblical, liturgical, and other texts were translated and copied. In all probability, as we have seen, monk-scribes were the ones who adapted the *Estrangelo* bookhand of classical Syriac for writing CPA. Once the convention of writing the language in Syriac script was established, it was, of course, readily available for use in inscriptions as well as in manuscripts.

CPA inscriptions have been studied in the effort to determine the social status of the speakers of the language. On the basis of their distribution, the quality of their execution, and their general ambience, Milka Levy-Rubin has argued that CPA was the language of a relatively poor and disenfranchised population, outside the urban centers in Palestine. On her hypothesis, neither CPA nor the Christian Arabic that largely supplanted it after the eighth century ever seriously displaced Greek as the dominant cultural language of the patriarchate of Jerusalem.[73] In my view, while it is clear that Greek enjoyed an enormous prestige in the public places of the ecclesiastical establishment throughout Syria/Palestine in Byzantine and early Islamic times, where Greek inscriptions fulfilled an almost iconic function in churches, in cemeteries, and on dedicatory plaques, it is far from evident that the presence of such inscriptions in a locale indicated that Greek was spoken there.[74] On the other hand, where Aramaic or Arabic inscriptions appear, because of their relative lack of the social and ecclesiastical prestige of Greek, they may be taken as evidence of the currency of these languages in the locale. But it does not follow that the deployment of these local languages bespeaks poverty and social disenfranchisement. Rather, it suggests a burgeoning accommodation to the cultural facts of the place, especially at a distance from the centers of empirewide pilgrimage in the Holy Land. In the early Islamic period, when Arabic was quickly becoming the lingua franca of a new world order, Greek inscriptions persisted in ecclesiastical premises, and Greek persisted in the

[71]On John of Ephesus, see S. Ashbrook Harvey, *Asceticism and Society in Crisis: John of Ephesus and* The Lives of the Eastern Saints (Berkeley, 1990); eadem, "Remembering Pain: Syriac Historiography and the Separation of the Churches," *Byzantion* 58 (1988), 295–308.

[72]See the discussion of this phenomenon in Griffith, "The Signs and Wonders of Orthodoxy."

[73]See the studies of Milka Levy-Rubin cited in note 39 above.

[74]Consider, for example, the presence of a Greek inscription in the church of Mar Jacob in Nisibis, in the heart of the Syriac-speaking world. See J. Jarry, "Inscriptions syriaques et arabes inédites du Ṭūr 'Abdīn," *Annales islamologiques* 10 (1972), 242–43, no. 74. See also G. Bell, *The Churches and Monasteries of the Ṭur 'Abdin*, with introduction and notes by M. Mundell Mango (London, 1982), 143–45.

divine liturgy and in theology, at the same time that Arabic was becoming an ecclesiastical language.[75] Gradually, from the ninth century onward, while Greek retained its social prestige and iconic functions, one would be hard-pressed to find any evidence of new compositions in this lingua sacra in Syria/Palestine. It is in this sense that one might agree with Cyril Mango's dictum that "in the course of the 9th century the practice of Greek all but died out in Palestine and Syria."[76] CPA, too, persisted into the Islamic era as a local liturgical language. However, unlike Greek, it was gradually eclipsed altogether by Arabic, which was not the language of a local Christian community but the idiom of the world of Islam, which all the Christian communities in the caliphate gradually adopted for purposes of survival.

III. Melkite Arabic

Beginning in the eighth century, and swelling into a flood in the ninth century, Arabic came to challenge even Greek in the monastic communities of the Judean desert as the spoken language of the local Christians, largely the Melkite community of the world of Islam. So much was this the case that Arabic itself may be seen as one of the defining features of the Melkite ecclesiastical identity.[77] So distinctive was the Arabic employed in this monastic milieu that Joshua Blau, the modern scholar who has the most intensely studied what he once called "old south Palestinian" Arabic as a manifestation of Middle Arabic,[78] has recently suggested that the Arabic texts that circulated in the monastic communities of Palestine actually furnish enough evidence to warrant the conclusion that there was among the Melkites throughout the caliphate a literary *koinē*, which served as an Arabic lingua franca for the whole Melkite community throughout the oriental patriarchates.[79] This lingua franca then became the cultural carrier of the distinctive Melkite identity among the Christians living in the world of Islam. It had at its core an allegiance to the orthodoxy of the "six councils" as they had been accepted in the late seventh century in the Judean desert monasteries of Jerusalem,[80] the doctrines of which were systematized and put forward in summary fashion by the great eighth-century teacher from Mar Sabas monastery, John of Damascus.[81] But it was Theodore Abū Qurrah, the scion of a new generation at Mar Sabas monastery in the late eighth century, who stood as the first notable Melkite writer in Arabic whose name we know, who most

[75] See R. Schick, *The Christian Communities of Palestine from Byzantine to Islamic Rule: A Historical and Archaeological Study* (Princeton, 1995).

[76] Mango, "Greek Culture in Palestine," 151.

[77] On this subject, see S. H. Griffith, "Melkites in the Umayyad Era: The Making of a Christian Identity in the World of Islam," paper presented at the Fourth Workshop on Late Antiquity and Early Islam (as above, note 39).

[78] See J. Blau, *A Grammar of Christian Arabic*, CSCO 267, 276, 279 (Louvain, 1966–67).

[79] See J. Blau, "A Melkite Arabic Literary *Lingua Franca* from the Second Half of the First Millennium," *BSO[A]S* 57 (1994), 14–16.

[80] In due course, Melkites included the seventh ecumenical council, Nicaea II in 787, among the councils of orthodoxy, but the practice of affirming the "six councils" lasted until modern times. Among the Melkite collections of canons in Arabic from the 13th to the 17th century, only seven of the twenty-one MSS mention the seventh council. See J. B. Darblade, *La collection canonique arabe des Melkites (XIIIe–XVIIe siècles)* (Harissa, 1946), 154–55.

[81] See B. Studer, *Die theologische Arbeitsweise des Johannes von Damaskus,* StPB 2 (Ettal, 1956); B. Kotter, *Die Überlieferung der* Pege Gnoseos *des hl. Johannes von Damaskos,* StPB 5 (Ettal, 1959).

readily reflects the personal profile of the new Sabaïte monastic writer: he clearly put forward the requisite ecclesiastical Hellenism in an Arabic idiom thoroughly conditioned by the Islamic religious milieu in which the Melkites lived.[82]

Here is not the place to set out in any detail the account of the early production of texts in Arabic on the part of the monks of the monasteries of Palestine. I have addressed this issue at some length in other essays.[83] Suffice it for now to call attention to those items that can confidently be dated to the eighth century, the era of the turn to Arabic.

The earliest Christian Palestinian text written in Arabic that carries some internal suggestion of the date of its composition is a now anonymous apologetic tract which its first modern editor entitled "On the Triune Nature of God."[84] At one point in the text the author spoke of the stable endurance of Christianity against all odds: "If this religion were not truly from God it would not have stood so unshakably for seven hundred and forty-six years."[85] If one computes the beginning of the Christian era from the year of the Incarnation, according to the Alexandrian world era, which Palestinian scribes were likely to use prior to the tenth century, one arrives at a date of 755 for the composition of the treatise.[86] This year is, of course, only a year or so removed from the probable date of the death of John of Damascus (ca. 754). Otherwise, the earliest recorded date so far published from an early documentary source which refers to a Christian text in Arabic is contained in a note appended to the end of an Arabic version of the story of the "Fathers who were killed at Mount Sinai," which appears in two manuscripts, Sinai Arabic MS 542 (fol. 15r) and British Library Oriental MS 5019 (fol. 58b). The wording of the note is slightly different in the two manuscripts, but they agree in stating that the text of the martyrdom was originally translated from Greek into Arabic in the Hijra year 155, which corresponds to A.D. 772.[87] On this evidence, one might be inclined to date the

[82] See S. H. Griffith, "Theodore Abū Qurrah: The Intellectual Profile of an Arab Christian Writer of the First Abbasid Century," Annual Lecture of the Irene Halmos Chair of Arabic Literature, Tel Aviv University, 1992.

[83] See Griffith, *Arabic Christianity* (above, note 31).

[84] See M. D. Gibson, ed., *An Arabic Version of the Acts of the Apostles and the Seven Catholic Epistles, from an Eighth or Ninth Century MS. in the Convent of St Catharine on Mount Sinai, with a Treatise, "On the Triune Nature of God,"* Studia Sinaitica 7 (Cambridge, 1899). See also S. Khalil Samir, "The Earliest Arab Apology for Christianity (c. 750)," in S. Khalil Samir and J. S. Nielsen, *Christian Arabic Apologetics during the Abbasid Period (750–1258)* (Leiden, 1994), 57–114. See now the Italian translation, with notes and introduction, in M. Gallo, ed. and trans., *Palestinese anonimo, omelia arabo-cristiana dell'VIII secolo,* Collana di Testi Patristici diretta da Antonio Quacquarelli 116 (Rome, 1994).

[85] Sinai Arabic MS 154, fol. 100v. Gibson unaccountably skipped this passage in her edition of the treatise. I am indebted to Fr. Samir Khalil Samir for the reference, which is clearly legible in the Library of Congress microfilm copy of Sinai Arabic MS 154.

[86] Mark N. Swanson proposes a date of 788 for this treatise, arguing that Melkite writers of the period would count the beginning of the Christian era from the year of the crucifixion and not from the year of the incarnation, according to the Alexandrian system. In support of this view he cites several passages from several works in which the writers mention the rent of the temple veil at the time of Jesus' death (Matt. 27:51) as a sign of the end of the old covenant and the beginning of the new one. See M. N. Swanson, "Some Considerations for the Dating of *Fī Tathlīth Allāh al-Wāḥid* (Sinai Ar. 154) and *al-Jāmiʿ Wujūh al-Imān* (London, British Library or. 4950)," *Parole de l'Orient* 18 (1993), 115–41. It seems to this writer that this *theologoumenon,* common enough in early Christian texts, is unlikely to have displaced the equally common practice of counting the Christian years from the first year of the incarnation. See V. Grumel, *La chronologie* (Paris, 1958).

[87] See the details discussed in S. H. Griffith, "The Arabic Account of ʿAbd al-Masīh an-Najrānī al-Ghassānī," *Le Muséon* 98 (1985), 337–42, reprinted in Griffith, *Arabic Christianity.*

beginning of an ecclesiastical career for the Arabic language in the monasteries of Palestine to the third quarter of the eighth century. But this would be to reckon without the hints one can find in other places for an earlier use of Arabic. For example, early in the present century a dual-language fragment of Psalm 78:20–61 in Greek and Arabic was found in the archives of the Umayyad Mosque in Damascus. The unusual feature of the piece is that the Arabic text appears in Greek script.[88] On the basis of a paleographical analysis of this script, plus other considerations, Bruno Violet dated it to the end of the eighth century. But now Rachid Haddad has argued that a date just a little after the first decade of the eighth century is probable.[89] Similarly, there is the case of the intriguing quintuple palimpsest among the Arab Christian manuscripts in the Sinai collection, Sinai Arabic MS 514, which Aziz Suryal Atiya dubbed the "Codex Arabicus." It is all by itself virtually a complete stratigraphic record of the Christian literary history of Palestine to the early Arabic period. The lower two layers, containing Syriac texts of the Peshitta, are succeeded by a Gospel lectionary in Greek uncials of the seventh century, followed by an undetermined text in an archaic Kufic hand of Arabic from the first century of the Hijra, which in turn was washed away to make room for what Atiya calls the "middle Kufic of the eighth to early ninth century."[90] Finally, in this same connection one might mention a papyrus text of unknown provenance that contains fragments of two Arab Christian disputations with Muslims from the early period. On the basis of paleographical considerations, Georg Graf dated them to the middle or to the second half of the eighth century.[91]

When all is said and done, the available documentary evidence therefore allows one to say that there are grounds for assuming that the Judean desert monks took to translating church books into Arabic and to composing original works in the language of public life in the Muslim caliphate early in the second half of the eighth century, it not being unlikely that the enterprise actually began somewhat earlier in the century. In all probability, New Testament texts such as the Arabic Gospel lectionaries that were copied in Mar Sabas and Mar Chariton in the ninth century have their origins in Arabic translations made earlier in the eighth century. And an interesting feature of these translations, all made from Greek, is that they show considerable evidence of influence from the text of the Gospels preserved in Christian Palestinian Aramaic, which also rests on a Greek *Vorlage*.[92]

It is clear then that the turn to Arabic in the Palestinian monasteries was contemporaneous with the era, almost a century after the Islamic conquest, in which Cyril Mango and others have seen these same monasteries in the ensemble as "the most active centre of Greek culture"[93] in the world of that time, Byzantium included. Furthermore, it seems

[88]See B. Violet, "Ein zweisprachiges Psalmfragment aus Damaskus," offprint, with corrections, from *Orientalistische Litteratur-Zeitung*, 1901 (Berlin, 1902).

[89]See R. Haddad, "La phonétique de l'arabe chrétien vers 700," in *La Syrie de Byzance à l'Islam*, ed. P. Canivet and J.-P. Rey-Coquais (Damascus, 1992), 159–64.

[90]See Atiya, *The Arabic Manuscripts of Mount Sinai*, 19.

[91]See G. Graf, "Christlich-arabische Texte: Zwei Disputationen zwischen Muslîmen und Christen," in F. Bilabel and A. Grohmann, *Griechische, koptische und arabische Texte zur Religion und religiösen Literatur in Ägyptens Spätzeit* (Heidelberg, 1934), 4.

[92]See S. H. Griffith, "The Gospel in Arabic: An Inquiry into Its Appearance in the First Abbasid Century," *OC* 69 (1985), 155–56, reprinted in Griffith, *Arabic Christianity*.

[93]Mango, "Greek Culture in Palestine," 149–50.

that initially, in the eighth century, Arabic was beginning to occupy that niche in the social fabric of the monasteries and of the church in Palestine that had theretofore been solely the province of Christian Palestinian Aramaic, that is to say, the language of the non-Greek-speaking local population of the patriarchate of Jerusalem. One gets the impression from the *Vita* of Stephen the Sabaïte (d. 794), written in Greek by Leontius of Damascus at the turn of the eighth and ninth centuries, that Greek was no longer spoken in a day-to-day way in the Palestinian monastic community, albeit that the monks wrote in Greek and the liturgy was largely Greek. For in at least two places in the *Vita* Leontius makes a point of saying that Stephen spoke in Greek (Ἑλληνιστὶ) to visitors, as if this was something unexpected and therefore remarkable.[94] Furthermore, there is evidence that at this same time some monks had considerable difficulty learning the requisite amount of Greek for the liturgical life of the monastery. At the end of an account of the twenty martyrs who were killed by marauding Arabs at Mar Sabas around the year 796/797 the author included a report of some miracles that were worked later by means of their intercession. One of them involves a Syrian man, who, try as he might, could not learn Greek well enough to be proficient in the recitation of the Psalter or in the reading of Holy Scripture. He made himself sick with the effort he expended in trying to learn Greek. Then, in a dream, the Protodeacon Anastasius, one of the martyred monks, who had been his friend, appeared to him and, as the text has it, wiped his tongue clean of a viscous, greenish-yellow substance. When he awoke, the Syrian had miraculously learned Greek and was able to use it with a facility that astounded his confreres.[95]

The period of the demise of CPA as a spoken language, after the eighth century, corresponds to the period of the rise of Arabic in the same milieu. Indeed there is the very real possibility that some monks were trilingual in this period, speaking Greek, Aramaic, and Arabic. But there is an important difference to be noted in the range and the fortunes of CPA and Arabic. The latter was the language of a burgeoning commonwealth,[96] indeed the carrier of a vibrant new culture, while the former was very much a provincial dialect of the Aramaic family of languages, which under the pressure of Arabic was ultimately to disappear. Moreover, while both Arabic and Aramaic took second place behind Greek in ecclesiastical importance in the Melkite Christian communities of the Islamic world, CPA was never more than the language of Palestine and parts of Transjordan, while the Arabic-speaking monks of the Judean desert monasteries, and particularly those of Mar Sabas monastery, found themselves at the heart of an Arabic-speaking, ecclesiastical network that stretched from the territories of the patriarchate of Antioch southward through the Sinai and into Egypt, with Jerusalem as the constant *point de repère* for all concerned, even as their worldly fortunes were shrinking under the pressure of Islam.[97]

Unlike the case with CPA, in which language no original compositions have yet been found, all of the extant works being translations from Greek, already in the eighth cen-

[94]"Vita s. Stephani Sabaitae Thaumaturgi Monachi," in *AASS*, Jul. III (Paris-Rome, 1868), 540C, 567E. In fact, the *Vita* of St. Stephen is preserved complete only in Arabic. See B. Pirone, *Leonzio di Damasco: Vita di Santo Stefano Sabaita*, Studia Orientalia Christiana Monographiae 4 (Cairo-Jerusalem, 1991).

[95]See A. Papadopoulos-Kerameus, Συλλογὴ Παλαιστίνης καὶ Συριακῆς Ἁγιολογίας, I, *PPSb* 19.3 (St. Petersburg, 1907), 36. See also "De SS. Viginti Monachis Martyribus," in *AASS*, Mar. III (Paris-Rome, 1865), 176E–F.

[96]See G. Fowden, *Empire to Commonwealth: Consequences of Monotheism in Late Antiquity* (Princeton, 1993), 138–68.

[97]See Griffith, "Melkites in the Umayyad Era."

tury Arabic-speaking monks were authoring original works in the language of the Qur'ān, as well as translating the Scriptures and other Christian and monastic classics into that language from Greek and Syriac. What is more, from the ninth century until well into the eleventh century, while there is a crescendo in the number of Arabic texts written in the monasteries,[98] there is little or no evidence from this period of any significant compositions in Greek.[99] The irony is that in the Arabic-speaking Melkite communities in the oriental patriarchates, for a long time Greek was no more than a patristic and liturgical language, albeit one of great prestige. Its fortunes were not altogether unlike those of CPA in Palestine, with the important difference that in later days the prospects of Greek would revive, but CPA would be lost for good.

In Arabic, as in Greek or Christian Palestinian Aramaic, an important purpose of the monks of the Judean desert monasteries was to keep the special holiness of their institution before the minds of the Melkite community, especially that of the Sabaïte monasteries. There is an interesting passage illustrating this concern in the story of Michael the Sabaïte, a martyr in the time of the caliph ʿAbd al-Malik (685–705). The story was written originally in Arabic in the ninth century, but it survives only in Georgian and Greek versions. The author had the following to say about Mar Sabas monastery: "Just as Jerusalem is the queen of all cities, so is the laura of Sabas the prince of all deserts, and so far as Jerusalem is the norm of other cities, so too is St. Sabas the exemplar for other monasteries."[100]

A special sign of the importance of the monastic establishment may also be seen in the early translations of Cyril of Scythopolis' *Lives of the Monks of Palestine* into Arabic.[101] In fact, it is only in Arabic that the full text of Cyril's life of the monk Abramius (474–557) has been preserved.[102] It is interesting to observe, in the Arabic version of Cyril's *Lives*, that the monk-translators have not adhered slavishly to the Greek original, but did make an effort to have the accounts come alive in Arabic,[103] testifying thereby to the continued relevance of Cyril's work in the monastic communities as an important record of the signs and wonders of the Chalcedonian orthodoxy to which they continued vigorously to pledge allegiance. Similarly, the monks continued to commend the holiness of the

[98] See Griffith, "The Monks of Palestine" (above, note 31).

[99] *Pace* Levy-Rubin, "Society, Language, and Culture."

[100] P. Peeters, "La Passion de s. Michel le Sabaïte," *AB* 48 (1930), par. 14, p. 76. On this text, see also M. J. Blanchard, "The Georgian Version of the Martyrdom of Saint Michael, Monk of Mar Sabas Monastery," *ARAM* 6 (1994), 149–63; and S. H. Griffith, "Michael, the Martyr and Monk of Mar Sabas Monastery, at the Court of the Caliph ʿAbd al-Malik: Christian Apologetics and Martyrology in the Early Islamic Period," *ARAM* 6 (1994), 115–48.

[101] See S. H. Griffith, "Anthony David of Baghdad, Scribe and Monk of Mar Sabas: Arabic in the Monasteries of Palestine," *ChHist* 58 (1989), 7–19, reprinted in Griffith, *Arabic Christianity.*

[102] See G. Graf, "Athār nāṣrānī qadīm; aw tarjamah mār Abramiūs al-qiddīs bi l-ʿarabiyyah," *al-Machriq* 8 (1905), 258–65. Graf also published a German translation of the text in G. Graf, "Die arabische Vita des hl. Abramios," *BZ* 14 (1905), 509–18. What is preserved in Arabic is incorporated into the French version of the life of Abramius in A. J. Festugière, *Les moines d'orient,* vol. III, pt. 3, *Les moines de Palestine* (Paris, 1963), 69–79. In Price, *Cyril of Scythopolis,* the portions of Abramius' life that are missing from the Greek are translated into English from the Latin version of the Arabic, in P. Peeters, "Historia S. Abramii ex apographo arabico," *AB* 24 (1905), 349–56.

[103] See the forthcoming study by Kate Leeming, "Byzantine History in Arabic: Translations of Greek Hagiographies in a Ninth-Century Palestinian Manuscript (Vaticanus Arabicus 71)," paper presented at the Syriac Symposium II, the Catholic University of America, 8–10 June 1995.

monastic establishment in the Judean desert by composing martyrologies, largely in Arabic, that celebrated the fidelity of those of their number who gave their lives in testimony to their faith in response to the new religious challenge of Islam.[104] And in the Melkite community it was also the monks who were the first composers of apologetical tracts in Arabic in the effort to provide Christians with answers to the objections to their faith raised by Muslims.[105]

In later times, when there were greater numbers of Greek-speakers in Jerusalem and in the monasteries of the Holy Land than there had been between the ninth century and the coming of the crusaders from the West, Jacques de Vitry (1170–1213), the Latin bishop of Acre, noted in his *History of Jerusalem* that the "Syrians,"[106] as he called the local Arabophone Christians, used Arabic only for their secular business. In religious matters, the bishop alleged, they were totally dependent on the Greeks.

> The Syrians use the Saracen language in their common speech, and they use the Saracen script in deeds and business and all other writing, except for the Holy Scriptures and other religious books, in which they use the Greek letters; wherefore in Divine service their laity, who only know the Saracenic tongue, do not understand them. . . . The Syrians exactly follow the rules and customs of the Greeks in Divine service and other spiritual matters, and obey them as their superiors.[107]

While it is somewhat disheartening to see that in the twelfth century Jacques de Vitry had no knowledge of the burgeoning Christian Arabic literature that poured from the monasteries of the Judean desert, particularly those of Mar Sabas and Mar Chariton, one notices also that, according to him, in the late twelfth century in Jerusalem, Arabic did not even play that role in the divine liturgy which in an earlier day Christian Palestinian Aramaic, Armenian, and Arabic itself had played. Now, according to the Latin bishop of Acre, "in Divine service their laity, who only know the Saracenic tongue, do not understand them," because the liturgy is entirely in Greek. It is as if the earlier practice of making an allowance in the liturgy for the local languages of the non-Greek-speaking population had been reversed. And, indeed, there is some evidence that in Byzantium in the eleventh and twelfth centuries this is exactly what happened; an earlier linguistic pluralism gave way to an insistence on Greek in matters of faith and cult. Gilbert Dagron has recently ascribed this eventuality to the fact that at this time "the Byzantine authors, or licensed 'heresiologues,' more and more had the tendency to tie the heretical phenomenon to linguistic and ethnic diversity."[108] Consequently, he goes on to conclude that an attitude developed in Byzantium, according to which, even "if Christianity was recognized to be multilingual, a hierarchy of languages existed, and orthodoxy was exclusively

[104] See S. H. Griffith, "Christians, Muslims, and Neo-Martyrs: Saints' Lives in Holy Land History," forthcoming publication in the proceedings of the conference, "Interactions between Religious Communities in the Holy Land (1st–15th Centuries)," Jerusalem, Yad Izhak Ben-Zvi, 2–5 October 1994.

[105] See Griffith, *Arabic Christianity;* idem, "Theodore Abū Qurrah." See also Samir and Nielsen, *Christian Arabic Apologetics.*

[106] It is interesting to observe that in the 12th century western writers were still referring to the indigenous Christians of the Holy Land as *Syri,* just as Eusebius and Egeria had done in the 4th century.

[107] Jacques de Vitry, *The History of Jerusalem: A.D. 1180,* trans. A. Steward (London, 1896), 68–69.

[108] G. Dagron, "Formes et fonctions du pluralisme linguistique à Byzance (IXe–XIIe siècle)," *TM* 12 (1994), 228.

Greek."[109] In this connection, Dagron cites the response attributed to Theodore Balsamon (d. after 1195), the patriarch of Antioch resident in Constantinople in the late twelfth century, to the following question: "Is it without danger that orthodox Syrians and Armenians, but also faithful from other countries, say the office in their own language, or are they in any case obliged to officiate with books written in Greek?" Balsamon replied: "Those who are in every point orthodox, if they are totally foreign to the Greek language, can celebrate the liturgy in their own language, using habitual responses to the holy prayers, without modification and transcribed from *kontakia* beautifully written in Greek letters."[110] This must have been the attitude that came to prevail in Jerusalem in the years when the Greek-speakers returned even to the Judean desert monastic communities in the wake of the crusaders from the West. Greek enjoyed a renaissance in the Holy Land, and the liturgy of Constantinople eclipsed the old liturgy of Jerusalem. But Arabic remained the language of public discourse in the Melkite community, and the Gospel was proclaimed in the idiom of the Qur'ān, still in large part due to the efforts of the monks of the Holy Land monasteries.

IV. Appendix: Armenian and Georgian

Two language communities of particular importance in the Holy Land during the Byzantine and early Islamic periods were the Armenians and the Georgians. Both of them also made their mark in the Judean desert monastic communities, although their languages were not central to the monastic experience there, as was Greek, nor were they local languages, as were Christian Palestinian Aramaic and Arabic. Nevertheless, documents composed in both of these languages, and emanating from Palestine, have been of considerable historical significance.

The Armenian presence in the Holy Land throughout the Byzantine period and well into Islamic times has been largely by way of continuous pilgrimage. Numerous inscriptions left behind by the pilgrims are the testimonies to this traffic. And they suggest that the number of pilgrims increased considerably in the seventh century, once Islamic power removed any resistance the Chalcedonian government of Byzantium might have offered to the largely Jacobite Armenians bent on pilgrimage to the holy places.[111] But there were Armenian monks in the Judean monasteries as well, as is clear from the special provision made for them in the matter of the use of their language in the liturgy in the monastery of Mar Sabas.[112] What is more, there is also evidence that from the seventh century onward there was an enclave of Chalcedonian Armenians in the Jerusalem patriarchate engaged in theological activity and producing texts that had a considerable influence on ecclesiastical and political developments back in Armenia.[113]

[109] Dagron, "Formes et fonctions," 230.

[110] G. A. Rhalles and M. Potles, eds., *Syntagma ton theion kai hieron kanonon*, 6 vols. (Athens, 1852–59), IV, 452–53; quoted in Dagron, "Formes et fonctions," 230.

[111] See the introductory remarks of Michael E. Stone, *The Armenian Inscriptions from the Sinai* (Cambridge, Mass., 1982), 30–36, 49–52.

[112] See the texts cited in notes 12–14 above. See also C. Renoux, "L'épiphanie à Jérusalem au IVe et au Ve siècle d'après le lectionnaire arménien de Jérusalem," *REArm*, n.s., 2 (1965), 343–59; idem, *Le lectionnaire de Jérusalem en Arménie: Le čašoc': I. Introduction et liste des manuscrits*, PO 44.4 = 200 (Turnhout, 1989).

[113] See S. P. Cowe, "An Armenian Job Fragment from Sinai and Its Implications," *OC* 76 (1972), 123–57.

In the ninth century there was apparently a concerted effort made by Patriarch Thomas of Jerusalem (807–821) and his associate Theodore Abū Qurrah to engage Armenians in theological debate in both Jerusalem and Armenia proper.[114] So it is clear that the Armenian presence in the monastic communities was an important one, which only grew in significance after the Islamic conquest.

Georgians were in the Holy Land from the middle of the fifth century onward, as both pilgrim testimonies make clear and the records of the monastic establishments certify.[115] As Chalcedonians, they were intimately involved with the management of the see of Jerusalem. But from the modern scholarly point of view, one of the most important contributions of Georgian monks in the Judean desert monasteries, particularly in the early Islamic period, was their activity as translators. Numerous texts, originally written in Greek and Arabic, have survived into modern times only because they have been preserved in Georgian translations. The monastery of Mar Sabas was itself the site of an important enclave of Georgian monks, who, together with their colleagues in other Palestinian monasteries, were literarily active especially in the eighth, ninth, and tenth centuries.[116] In particular, one might cite their production of hagiographical and liturgical texts.[117] But one of the most important Georgian texts to come out of this milieu and to survive into modern times is the so-called Palestinian-Georgian *Calendar*.[118] It was composed by a monk named John Zosimus at the monastery of Mar Sabas at some point in the third quarter of the tenth century. John Zosimus is otherwise known to have worked as a copyist at the monastery at Mount Sinai during the last quarter of the century.[119] The *Calendar* is unique in that it offers the modern researcher a firsthand look, as it were, at the liturgical practices of Jerusalem in the period before the reassertion of Byzantine influence in the area, and it reflects the interests principally of the Judean desert monasteries during a period that is otherwise little known.

[114] See Griffith, "Theodore Abū Qurrah."

[115] See G. Peradze, "An Account of the Georgian Monks and Monasteries in Palestine," *Georgica* 4–5 (1937), 181–237.

[116] See Peeters, *Le tréfonds oriental*, 202–13.

[117] See the numerous studies of Gérard Garitte, collected under the title *Scripta Disiecta, 1941–1977*, 2 vols. (Louvain-la-Neuve, 1980). See also M. Tarchnischvili, *Le grand lectionnaire de l'Église de Jérusalem (Ve–VIIIe siècle)*, 4 vols., CSCO 188–89, 204–5 (Louvain, 1959–60); and P. Jeffery, "The Sunday Office of Seventh-Century Jerusalem in the Georgian Chant Book (Iadgari): A Preliminary Report," *Studia Liturgica* 21 (1991), 52–75.

[118] See G. Garitte, *Le Calendrier palestino-géorgien du Sinaiticus 34 (Xe siècle)* (Brussels, 1958).

[119] See Garitte, *Le Calendrier*, 19.

BASHĪR/BĒSĒR: BOON COMPANION OF THE BYZANTINE EMPEROR LEO III; THE ISLAMIC RECENSION OF HIS STORY IN *LEIDEN ORIENTAL MS* 951 (2)

In Greek accounts of the origins of the government's iconoclast policy in Byzantium at the instigation of the emperor Leo III (717-741), a person named Bēsḗr (Βησήρ) appears in the emperor's entourage, who is said to have encouraged the imperial policy of rejecting the holy icons. There has been a considerable amount of discussion among historians, as we shall see, about the identity of Bēsḗr, as they have sorted through the possible allusions to him in Greek, Syriac, and Arabic texts[1]. Now, the purpose of the present article is to introduce into the discussion yet another source document — a Muslim Arabic text that has not gone unnoticed by scholars[2], but which has not received the attention it deserves. It is a dispute-text, which is to say that it purports to be the account of an argument about religion between a Muslim and a Christian. The story of Bēsḗr has a place in it, in that the account of his fortune in Byzantium provides the narrative framework within which the argument about religion finds its setting.

The discussion here will unfold under three major headings: the Bēsḗr story; the dispute text; and iconoclasm in Byzantium. An edition of the Arabic text, together with an English translation and commentary will follow as an appendix.

I

The Bēsḗr Story

The discussion of the Bēsḗr story falls naturally under two headings, according to the Christian recension of it on the one hand, and the Islamic recension on the other. In the one telling Bēsḗr is a renegade, a

[1] The basic work of synthesis and interpretation has been done by S. Gero, *Byzantine Iconoclasm during the Reign of Leo III, with Particular Attention to the Oriental Sources* (*CSCO*, 346), Louvain, 1973 (hereafter: Gero, *Byzantine Iconoclasm*).

[2] See P. Crone, *Islam, Judeo-Christianity and Byzantine Iconoclasm*, in *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam*, 2 (1980), p. 77, n. 95 (hereafter: Crone, *Islam*); S. Gero, *Early Contacts between Byzantium and the Arab Empire: a Review and Some Reconsiderations*, in M. A. Bakhit (ed.), *Proceedings of the Second Symposium on the History of Bilād al-Shām during the Early Islamic Period up to 40 A.H./640 A.D.*, vol. I, Ammān, 1987, p. 130.

man of proven perfidy; in the other account he is a friendly figure of manifest good will. It is interesting to note at the outset that iconoclasm as such is only incidental to the Bēsēr story, in both of its recensions.

A. *The Christian Recension*

One finds the first mention of Bēsēr in the *Chronicle* of Theophanes (d. 818), in the passage in which the iconophile chronicler, for obviously polemical reasons, links Leo III's iconoclast policy with an earlier directive on the part of the Muslim caliph Yazīd II (720-724) mandating the destruction of icons in Christian churches in the territories under Islamic rule[3]. Having made the damaging connection, Theophanes goes on to say of Leo:

He found a partisan for his stupidity: a man named Beser, who had been a Christian prisoner in Syria and had apostasized from his faith in Christ and converted to the Arabs' doctrine. He had been freed from his servitude to them not long before, and had reached the Roman emperor. Leo favored him because he was physically strong and because he agreed with Leo's wicked doctrine; he was a comrade in this great evil the Emperor worked[4].

Later in the *Chronicle*, Theophanes mentions Bēsēr again as a boon companion of the emperor. He says of Leo's anti-icon campaign, «he had as an ally Beser, who had denied God and was his match in this sort of nonsense»[5]. And in the account of events during the first year of the reign of the emperor Constantine V (741-775), Theophanes notes that when the count of the Opsikion theme, Artabasdos, attacked Constantine's army on its passage through his territory, Artabasdos «killed with a sword-stroke the Saracen-minded patrician Beser (τὸν μὲν πατρίκιον Βησὴρ τὸν σαρακηνόφρονα), who had advanced to meet him»[6].

[3] See A. A. Vasiliev, *The Iconoclastic Edict of the Caliph Yazid II, A.D. 721*, in *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 9 & 10 (1956), p. 25-47; L. W. Barnard, *The Graeco-Roman and Oriental Background of the Iconoclastic Controversy*, Leiden, 1974; Idem, *Byzantium and Islam, the Interaction of Two Worlds in the Iconoclastic Era*, in *Byzantinoslavica*, 36 (1975), p. 25-37; G. Strohmaier, *Der Kalif Yazīd II. und sein Traumdeuter; eine byzantinische Legende über den Ursprung des Ikonoklasmus*, in *Jahrbuch für Geschichte des Feudalismus*, 3 (1979), p. 11-17; G. R. D. King, *Islam, Iconoclasm, and the Declaration of Doctrine*, in *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, 48 (1985), p. 267-277 (hereafter: King, *Islam, Iconoclasm*)

[4] C. De Boor (ed.), *Theophanis Chronographia*, vol. I, Leipzig, 1883, p. 402 (hereafter: *Chronographia*). The translation is from H. Turtledove, *The Chronicle of Theophanes; an English Translation of anni mundi 6095-6305 (A.D. 602-813), with Introduction and Notes*, Philadelphia, 1982, p. 93-94 (hereafter: Turtledove, *The Chronicle*).

[5] *Chronographia*, I, p. 405; Turtledove, *The Chronicle*, p. 97.

[6] *Chronographia*, I, p. 414; Turtledove, *The Chronicle*, p. 105-106. See also the second report on Bēsēr's fate in the *Breviarium* of patriarch Nicephorus (806-815), C. De Boor (ed.), *Nicephori Archepiscopi Constantinopolitani Opuscula Historica*, Leipzig, 1880, p. 60. Gero thinks the reports of Theophanes and Nicephorus rely on a common source. See Gero, *Byzantine Iconoclasm*, p. 191, n. 8.

There are no other independent references to Bēsēr in Greek sources, which are not reliant on what Theophanes has to say about him. He is unfailingly presented as the «renegade» who seconded Leo III's iconoclastic policies[7]. According to the chronology of Theophanes, Leo III first met Bēsēr shortly before 722/723 A.D.; the emperor was still enjoying his companionship in 726/727; then, according to Theophanes, Bēsēr died by the sword of Artabasdos in 741/742.

In all probability it is this same Bēsēr who appears in two Syriac chronicles under the name Bashīr[8]. Both the patriarch Michael the Syrian (d. 1199) and the anonymous composer of the *Chronicon ad 1234* record an event in the reign of the caliph Hishām (724-743) in which a man of this name, a Byzantine prisoner, in a ruse to improve his lot, fraudulently claims to be a prince of royal blood, Tiberius, the son of the two-time emperor Justinian II (685-695, 705-711)[9]. Theophanes too recorded this event, but he made no mention of Bēsēr in connection with it. According to Theophanes' entry for the year 737/738:

In this year Hisham's son Suleiman took many prisoners from Asia. Among them he captured a Paphlagonian who said he was Tiberius son of Justinian. In order to honor his own son and terrify the Emperors, Hisham sent this fellow to Jerusalem with the appropriate imperial honors, soldiers, banners, and scepters. Hisham ordered him to tour all Syria so everyone could see and marvel at him[10].

As Michael the Syrian tells the story, it was not really Justinian II's son who was captured, but a man called Bashîr, who devised the ruse of calling himself Tiberios. Michael put it this way:

In 1048 (i.e., 737 A.D.) there came a man from Pergamos of Asia whose name was Bashîr, who was Roman by race, but Muslim by dress. He came to Ḥarrān, to a Roman man, and told him of the ruse he was prepared to undertake, telling him to inform on him, to accuse him before Sulaymān of actually being

[7] See L. Bréhier, art. *Beser*, in *DHGE*, VIII, Paris, 1935, col. 1171-1172.

[8] The identification is a tendentious one on this writer's part, which he thinks is justified by the circumstantial evidence of the composite portrait of the «renegade» Bēsēr which emerges from the Christian recension of the story. Gero doubts that Bēsēr and Bashîr are to be identified. See Gero, *Byzantine Iconoclasm*, p. 192-193.

[9] See below, n. 11 & 12 for the bibliographical references. The Syriac chronographer Bar Hebraeus also tells the story of Bashîr, but the account is reliant on what Michael the Syrian and the anonymous chronicler of the *Chronicon ad 1234* report. See P. Bedjan (ed.), *Gregorii Barhebraei Chronicon Syriacum*, Paris, 1890, p. 119.

[10] *Chronographia*, I, p. 411; Turtledove, *The Chronicle*, p. 102.

Tiberios, the son of Constantine, the king of the Romans, the one who was thought to be dead[11].

The *Chronicon ad 1234* tells a similar story, with some corrections:

A man named Bashîr came to Sulaymān, the son of king Hishām; he was Roman by race but Muslim, that is to say Arab, in dress. He had just been captured from Pergamos in Asia. He said he was Tiberios, the son of king Justinian, ... who was thought to be dead. This Bashîr came to a Roman man who was blind, whose name was Theophantos, who lived in Ḥarrān. He shared with him the ruse he was prepared to undertake. He instructed him to go accuse him before Sulaymān of being Tiberios, Justinian's son, come here covertly[12].

Both narratives go on to describe Bashīr/Tiberios' progress through Syria, with no word of the stay in Jerusalem Theophanes mentioned. Rather, the Syriac narratives tell of events at Edessa, where, as they say, «this renegade dared» to go to the altar to take the offerings in his own hands, «according to the custom of the Roman kings»[13], a usage both writers seem to disparage. Michael says further that «this false Tiberios pretended to be a Christian», and that «those who had put him to the test used to say he was a heathen (*ḥanpōyyô*) and he used to call on the Jews to conjure up familiar spirits for him, and the chief of the Ḥarrānians to inspect livers for him to see how far his affair would

[11] J.-B. CHABOT, *Chronique de Michel le Syrien*, vol. IV, Paris, 1910, p. 462 (hereafter: *Chronique de Michel*). Michael's spelling of the protagonist's name in Chabot's copy of the text is *byšyr*, a spelling which corresponds to the vowels in the Greek Bēsḗr, when one takes into account the current pronunciation of the Greek *ēta* in the Byzantine period. For earlier discussions of the spelling of the name see B. HEMMERDINGER, *BHCHP*, in *Byzantinische Zeitschrift*, 56 (1963), p. 6-7; GERO, *Byzantine Iconoclasm*, p. 189, n. 3, 192, n. 10. In the latter place Gero erroneously reports Michael's and Bar Hebraeus' spelling to be *bšr*. The present writer adopts the spelling Bashîr as the more likely one, on the basis of the texts to be quoted below.

[12] I.-B. CHABOT, *Chronicon ad Annum Christi 1234 Pertinens* (*CSCO*, 82), Paris & Louvain, 1916, p. 311 (hereafter: *Chronicon ad 1234*). The author spells the name *bšyr*, which corresponds to the Arabic spelling of the name in the text edited below, a not uncommon name in Arabic. Both Michael and the anonymous chronicler say that Bashîr was a 'Muslim' by dress. The term in Syriac in both writers is *mhgry'*. For the interpretation of this term see S. H. GRIFFITH, *Free Will in Christian* Kalām*: Moshe bar Kepha against the Teachings of the Muslims*, in *Le Muséon*, 100 (1987), p. 151-154. The anonymous chronicler adds the further note that Bashîr was by dress an 'Arab'. The Syriac term is *Ṭyy'*, the name of a Christian Arab tribe in pre-Islamic times, which was often used for 'Arabs' in general, and 'Muslims' in later times. See the discussion of these terms in S. H. GRIFFITH, *The Prophet Muḥammad, his Scripture and his Message according to the Christian Apologies in Arabic and Syriac from the First Abbasid Century*, in T. FAHD (ed.), *Vie du prophète Mahomet. Colloque de Strasbourg, 1980*, Paris, 1983, p. 122-124 (hereafter: GRIFFITH, *The Prophet Muḥammad*); J. S. TRIMINGHAM, *Christianity among the Arabs in Pre-Islamic Times*, London, 1979, p. 312-313.

[13] *Chronique de Michel*, IV, p. 463; *Chronicon ad 1234*, vol. 82, p. 311-312.

get»[14]. The whole business went so far, the author of the *Chronicon ad 1234* said, that «even Leo the king was in fear of him»[15]. Both chroniclers agree that the Muslims eventually discovered the ruse and killed Bashîr.

Theophanes and the two Syrian chroniclers agree that in the days of Leo III there was a «renegade» named Bēsḗr/Bashîr who had an association with the imperial family, and that he was «Saracen-minded», as Theophanes said, or a «heathen», as Michael the Syrian put it, two epithets which amounted to the same thing. The fact that the Greek and Syriac sources ascribe different fates to the «renegade» does not reduce the probability that the chroniclers are telling stories about the same notorious character. He was known by name to Christians of two denominations, Melkite and Jacobite, as an Islamicizing Christian of Leo III's day who was for the one an infidel iconophobe, and for the other a person who would not shrink from the greatest sacrilege in association with the sacred mysteries. And it is not completely impossible that he in fact both disappeared from the Byzantine scene on the occasion of the battle with Artabasdos, and was also eventually killed by Muslims, although the story of his impersonation of the disappeared Tiberios does seem to strain credibility.

Occasionally historians of Byzantium have suggested that Bēsḗr/Bashîr was also the Tessaracontapechys/Serantapechos who appears in the acts of the seventh ecumenical council in 787 as the Jewish magician at whose behest the caliph Yazīd II was said to have issued his directive for the destruction of Christian icons and crosses. The identification is made on the basis of the fact that in an Arabic historical source, the *Kitāb al-ʿuyūn*, there is a report of a Roman patrician, «a man of sagacity and cunning», as the text says, whom the Arabs called «the son of forty cubits»[16], an epithet corresponding to the import of the Greek nick-name Tessaracontapechys. This patrician was Leo III's envoy to the Muslim general Maslamah on the occasion of the latter's siege of Constantinople in the year 717, an assignment which suggests that the patrician was Arabophone. It is instructive too to note that Maslama distrusts the envoy on the advice of his counsellors, because he is known to be a man of cunning. As we have seen, Bēsḗr/Bashîr was

[14] *Chronique de Michel*, IV, p. 463. On the use of the Syriac term *ḥanpô*/*ḥanpōyyô* to mean 'Muslim', see GRIFFITH, *The Prophet Muḥammad*, p. 118-125.

[15] *Chronicon ad 1234*, vol. 82, p. 312.

[16] E. W. BROOKS, *The Campaign of 716-718, from Arabic Sources*, in *The Journal of Hellenic Studies*, 19 (1899), p. 26. See also J. STARR, *An Iconodulic Legend and its Historical Basis*, in *Speculum*, 8 (1933), p. 500-503.

in fact, as Theophanes said, an Arabophone patrician in the entourage of Leo III, whose physical stature was one of the features that attracted the emperor to him. What has made the identification of Tessaracontapechys with Bēsēr/Bashîr seem unlikely is that the former is a nick-name given by John of Jerusalem to a Jewish magician from Tiberias. And there is the further problem that the same man is not likely to have been Leo's patrician in 717 and Yazīd II's Jewish nemesis in 721, when Bēsēr/Bashîr would have to have already been in Leo's entourage. But it is not impossible that John of Jerusalem could have given Bēsēr/Bashîr's Greek nick-name to the Jew from Tiberias. That he did so cannot be proved, nor can it be proved that Bēsēr/Bashîr was in fact the «man of sagacity and cunning» whom the Arabs called «the son of forty cubits» in 717[17].

On the basis of what one can learn from the Greek and Syriac sources, Bēsēr emerges in the Christian recension of his story as an untrustworthy renegade who is indelibly tinged with suspicion. In Greek texts his fault is the iconophobia he is presumed to have acquired during his days with the Muslims. In Syriac texts he appears as a Christian in Muslim dress, an Islamicized Christian, and a Melkite, who in Jacobite eyes did not shrink even from sacrilege to further his own designs. Moreover, according to Michael the Syrian, he was willing to associate even with Jews and pagans. The profile of Bēsēr in the Christian recension of his story is, therefore, one of a perfidious renegade, who has compromised himself by his association with Muslims. This characterization of him remains constant, along with his name, his chronology, and his association with Leo III, in the several incidents in which the Greek and Syriac chroniclers assign roles to him.

B. *The Islamic Recension*

Scholars have known since the nineteenth century that an Islamic version of the Bashîr story appears in *Oriental MS* 951 in the Leiden University library[18]. With the exception of one or two brief references to it[19], however, no one has until now studied the text in full.

[17] See Gero's masterful handling of these intricate issues in appendix C, «Beser and Tessaracontapechys», in GERO, *Byzantine Iconoclasm*, p. 189-198.

[18] See R. R. A. DOZY, *Catalogus Codicum Orientalium Bibliothecae Academiae Lugduno Batavae*, vol. I, Leiden, 1851, p. 142 (hereafter: DOZY, *Catalogus Codicum Orientalium*); M. STEINSCHNEIDER, *Polemische und apologetische Literatur in arabischer Sprache, zwischen Muslimen, Christen und Juden*, Leipzig, 1877, p. 44 (hereafter: STEINSCHNEIDER, *Polemische und apologetische Literatur*).

[19] See n. 2 above.

Accordingly, the immediate purpose is first to give a brief account of the manuscript, and then to set out what information it contains about Bashîr.

1) *The Arabic Text*

Leiden University's *Oriental MS* 951 (2) is one among the manuscripts in the library's Warner collection[20]. It contains two works, a copy of the conditions (*šurûṭ*) of the so-called «Covenant of 'Umar» for the regulation of the lives of the Christians in the caliphate, and an account of the disputation in which one Wāṣil of Damascus had been engaged when he was a prisoner in Byzantium, first in the presence of the patrician Bāshîr, who had once been a Muslim, and then in the presence of the emperor[21]. As the early cataloger of the manuscript remarked, the two works are copied by the same hand and are so closely joined together in the text that not even a space separates them on the page[22]. Nevertheless, the first text was used extensively by H. A. Hamaker in his edition of al-Wāqidī's *Kitāb futûḥ Miṣri*[23], but the second one has remained entirely unpublished, except for the brief description of its contents by Moritz Steinschneider in 1877[24].

Leiden Oriental MS 951 (2) carries no date. Steinschneider ventured the guess that it was written around the year 800 A.H., i.e. 1397/1398 A.D.[25], while Hamaker had supposed it to be a century earlier, i.e., c. 700 A.H.[26]. On internal grounds one can be sure that the account of Wāṣil's disputation was written well after 750 A.D. because the writer says that Bashîr was a youth when he was captured by the Muslims and brought to the caliph's court «during the rule of the *banī Umayyah*»[27]. Furthermore, in the course of the disputation Wāṣil poses certain questions to the Christians which heretofore, as we shall see, have been documented only in Christian *kalām* texts from the ninth century A.D. This circumstance suggests that the dispute text copied in

[20] On the collection, see J. R. DE GROOT (ed.), *Levinus Warner and his Legacy; Three Centuries Legatum Warnerianum in the Leiden University Library*, Leiden, 1970.

[21] For the catalog descriptions of the MS, see DOZY, *Catalogus Codicum Orientalium*, p. 142; P. VOORHOEVE (comp.), *Handlist of Arabic Manuscripts in the Library of the University of Leiden and Other Collections in the Netherlands*, 2nd enlarged ed., The Hague, 1980, p. 104.

[22] DOZY, *Catalogus Codicum Orientalium*, p. 143.

[23] See H. A. HAMAKER, *Incerti Auctoris Liber de Expugnatione Memphidis et Alexandriae, vulgo adscriptus Abou Abdallae Mohammedi Omari Filio, Wakidaeo, Medinensi*, Leiden, 1825, p. 165-169 (hereafter: HAMAKER, *Incerti Auctoris Liber*).

[24] STEINSCHNEIDER, *Polemische und apologetische Literatur*, p. 44.

[25] *Ibid.*, p. 44.

[26] HAMAKER, *Incerti Auctoris Liber*, p. 169.

[27] *Leiden Oriental MS* 951 (2), f. 22ᵇ, l. 6.

Leiden Oriental MS 951 (2) itself was first composed in the ninth century.

2) *The Patrician Bashîr*

The story of Bashîr in *Leiden Oriental MS* 951 is the frame narrative for the account of Wāṣil ad-Dimashqī's argument about religion with the Byzantine authorities. Wāṣil is, therefore, the hero of the piece. Bashîr's story sets the scene for Wāṣil's appearance, and provides the Muslim controversialist with his entree to the Byzantine emperor, whose policies Wāṣil's arguments are then claimed to have influenced, especially in the matter of iconoclasm, as we shall see.

As for Bashîr, his story is as follows. He was captured as a youngster from among the Byzantine patricians in the time of the Umayyads[28]. Being handsome, he was allocated to the caliph's service, who gave him the name 'Bashîr' and provided for his education[29]. Bashîr learned to write Arabic, to recite the *Qur'ān*, to appreciate poetry, and to scrutinize traditions. He made the pilgrimage to Mecca. In short, he became an exemplary Muslim. But when he came of age, Satan inspired him, the text says, with the desire to return to his ancestral Christianity. He fled to Byzantine territory where he was presented to the emperor, who promptly enlisted him among his patricians and granted him land, where «even today», the text says, one may find «the villages of Bashîr».

On one occasion, when a band of Muslim captives were brought in, Wāṣil ad-Dimashqī was among their number. Bashîr interrogated them about their religion. But he got nowhere with Wāṣil, who at first refused to be drawn into controversy. Eventually Bashîr engages Wāṣil in an argument about religion, and Wāṣil gets the best of him, to the point that Bashîr dismisses him in anger, only to call him back the next day, when Bashîr has a priest noted for his eloquence in attendance. Wāṣil then proceeds to exasperate the priest with his dialectic, and he silences him. At this juncture, the text says:

> Bashîr fell back on his cushion and he put his sleeve into his mouth and he began to laugh. He said to the priest, 'Stand up, God shame you; I summoned you to convert him to Christianity, and now you have professed Islam'[30].

[28] There is no mention in the text of the caliph ʿAbd al-Malik ibn Marwān (685-705), such as Dozy, followed by Steinschneider, suggests. See Dozy, *Catalogus Codicum Orientalium*, p. 143; Steinschneider, *Polemische und apologetische Literatur*, p. 44. Rather, ʿAbd al-Malik's name appears as a marginal gloss on f. 22ᵇ.

[29] '*Bashîr*' in the *Qur'ān* means a bearer of good tidings, and it appears together with the term '*nadhîr*', one who brings a warning, as a title for Muḥammad (e.g., *al-Aʿrāf*, VII:188).

[30] *Leiden Oriental MS* 951 (2), f. 23ᵇ, l. 18-19.

At this point in the narrative Bashîr disappears, and the affair of the disputation comes to the notice of the emperor, who then has his own session with Wāṣil, with the consequences we shall in due course discuss.

It is clear that the author of the dispute text in *Leiden Oriental MS* 951 knew and appreciated the Bashîr story from an Islamic perspective. He does not name the Byzantine emperor who was Bashîr's patron, but nothing is inconsistent with the supposition that he was Leo III, in whose reign there were in fact numerous battles and skirmishes with Muslims, almost on a yearly basis. Moreover, Leo is reported to have been a participant in Muslim/Christian religious disputations, as the documents purporting to be correspondence between Leo and the caliph ʿUmar II (717-720) amply show[31]. One may then conclude that Bashîr and Bēsēr are one and the same person, whose story is told in both Christian and Muslim recensions. It is furthermore interesting to note that in both instances he is an incidental character in broader narratives, whose notoriety as a renegade calls attention to himself. His very incidental character in several traditions is, therefore, a testimony to his historicity.

II

The Arabic Dispute Text

The text in *Leiden Oriental MS* 951 which contains the Islamic recension of the Bēsēr/Bashîr story is a dispute text in which the otherwise unidentified Muslim *mutakallim*, Wāṣil ad-Dimashqī, deftly confounds his Christian interlocutors on three occasions during his Byzantine captivity. In the course of his report of these arguments about religion, the unknown author of the report also conveys some interesting historical information about ideas he and his Muslim contemporaries held about current events, most notably about iconoclasm in Byzantium. Accordingly, one may best exploit the riches of the text by discussing these issues separately: the dispute text, and the matter of Byzantium iconoclasm.

On the question of the identity of the author, all of the currently

[31] On this correspondence see Gero, *Byzantine Iconoclasm*, p. 44-47; 153-171. See also A. Jeffery, *Ghevond's Text of the Correspondence between 'Umar II and Leo III*, in *The Harvard Theological Review*, 37 (1944), p. 269-332; J.-M. Gaudeul, *The Correspondence between Leo and 'Umar*; *'Umar's Letter Rediscovered?*, in *Islamochristiana*, 10 (1984), p. 109-157.

available information is in the *isnād* at the beginning of the report, which conspicuously neglects to mention the writer's name, in favor of the names of the persons on whose authority the veracity of his account rests. There is no reason to repeat the names here, since they appear in the text, given in full in the appendix below. Suffice it to say that the *isnād* traces the account back to Wāṣil ad-Dimashqī himself.

All that we know about Wāṣil comes from this dispute text. We learn that he was «a shaykh of the people of Damascus»[32], to whom Bashîr said, «you are a man who had learned dialectical argument (*al-kalām*)»[33]. And Bashîr introduces him to the learned priest as «a man of the Arabs, who has knowledge, intelligence, and lineage among the Arabs»[34]. The emperor's ecclesiastical official, by contrast, twice refers to Wāṣil as an Arab Satan whom «the Sea has thrown up to you»[35]. In the end, when the Byzantine officials fail to confound Wāṣil, the text says, «they put him into the charge of some men and they removed him to the country of Damascus (*bilād Dimashq*)»[36].

It is perhaps improbable, but it is tempting to identify the Wāṣil of this narrative with the famous *mutakallim* of the same name, Wāṣil ibn ʿAṭā (699/700-748/749), who was as a matter of fact a contemporary of the Byzantine emperor Leo III (717-741). Wāṣil ibn ʿAṭā was one of the founders of record of the Muʿtazilite school of Islamic religious thought, the members of which became the *mutakallimūn par excellence* of the first Abbasid century. Wāṣil ibn ʿAṭā was born in Medina, and ended his life in the scholarly milieu of Baṣrah[37]. Not much is known of his career outside of his interest in *kalām*. He was a weaver, and a cloth merchant by trade. He was perhaps known to the Umayyad ruling family, because he was chosen to be a member of a delegation of the citizens of Baṣrah to the Umayyad governor in 744, by which time he had achieved his fame. It is not entirely inconceivable that earlier in life he would have participated in a military action against Byzantium. In fact, at the beginning of Leo III's reign there was an Arab naval attack on Constantinople, in 717-718, when Wāṣil was a youth, in which the Arab fleet was definitively wrecked, providing an opportunity for the

[32] *Leiden Oriental MS* 951, f. 22ᵇ, l. 14.
[33] *Ibid.*, f. 23ᵇ, l. 4.
[34] *Ibid.*, f. 23ᵇ, l. 6-7.
[35] *Ibid.*, f. 24ᵃ, l. 10 & 24ᵇ, l. 19.
[36] *Ibid.*, f. 24ᵇ, l. 20-21.
[37] On Wāṣil ibn ʿAṭā, see A. J. Wensinck, art. *Wāṣil b. ʿAṭā*, in *EI*¹, IV, Leiden, 1934, p. 1187-1188; B. Dodge, *The Fihrist of al-Nadim*, New York, 1970, vol. I, p. 383-384; vol. II, p. 1122; J. Van Ess, *Une lecture à rebours de l'histoire du Muʿtazilisme*, in *Revue des Études Islamiques*, 47 (1979), p. 40-56.

capture of Arabs whom «the sea has thrown up», to borrow the phrase of the text[38]. By this time, or shortly thereafter, Bashîr was in the emperor Leo's entourage. But it would only be by hindsight that Wāṣil ibn ʿAṭā could be called a *shaykh* at this time of his life. Furthermore, the Wāṣil of the dispute text is said to have belonged to the «people of Damascus» and to have been removed «to the country of Damascus»[39]. But one recalls that the origins of the dispute text may have been in the ninth century, the Abbasid era. Perhaps the reference to Damascus is not to Wāṣil's hometown but to the territory of the Umayyad caliphate, the capital city of which was Damascus. Perhaps it simply stood for *bilād ash-Shām*-Syria.

When all is said and done, one can only speculate that possibly the writer of the dispute text had Wāṣil ibn ʿAṭā in mind, as a famous Muslim *mutakallim*, the legendary father of the Muʿtazilites, whom one could imagine to have been able to confound the Byzantines in arguments about religion. Perhaps the writer of the dispute text in *Leiden Oriental MS* 951 also thought of the first 'Mutazilite' as the appropriate Muslim controversialist to have induced Leo III to instigate iconoclasm in Byzantium[40].

The dispute text is itself of considerable historical importance, because with few exceptions, almost all such texts known from the early Islamic period are from Christian hands, either in Arabic or in Syriac[41]. As for dispute texts by Muslims from the ninth century, or from the first Abbasid century and a half, the list of writers is soon exhausted[42]: ʿAlī ibn Rabbān at-Ṭabarī[43], al-Qāsim ibn Ibrāhīm[44], al-Jāḥiẓ[45], the philo-

[38] See n. 35 above. For historical orientation, see G. Ostrogorsky, *History of the Byzantine State*, New Brunswick, N.J., 1969, p. 156-165; P. K. Hitti, *History of the Arabs*, 9th ed., New York, 1967, p. 199-205.
[39] See n. 32 & 36 above.
[40] Modern scholars sometimes draw a parallel between the *Muʿtazila* and the Byzantine iconoclasts. See R. M. Haddad, *Iconoclasts and Muʿtazila: the Politics of Anthropomorphism*, in *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review*, 27 (1982), p. 287-305.
[41] See the lists in Griffith, *The Prophet Muḥammad*, p. 99-114.
[42] For a general orientation see E. Fritsch, *Islam und Christentum im Mittelalter; Beiträge zur Geschichte der muslimischen Polemik gegen das Christentum in arabischer Sprache*, Breslau, 1930; H. G. Dorman, *Toward Understanding Islam*, New York, 1948; Jane D. McAuliffe, *Perceptions of the Christians in Qur'ānic* Tafsīr (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Toronto), Toronto, 1984.
[43] See A. Mingana (ed.), *Kitāb ad-dīn wa ad-dawlah*, Cairo, 1923; Idem, *The Book of Religion and Empire; a semi-official defense and exposition of Islam written by order at the court and with the assistance of the caliph Mutawakkil (A.D. 847-861)*, Manchester, 1922; M. Bouyges, *Nos informations sur ʿAliy at-Ṭabariy*, in *Mélanges de l'Université Saint-Joseph*, 28 (1949-1950), p. 67-114; A. Khalifé & W. Kutsch, *Ar-radd ʿala-n-Naṣārā de ʿAlī aṭ-Ṭabarī*, in *Mélanges de l'Université Saint-Joseph*, 36 (1959), p. 115-148.
[44] See I. di Matteo, *Confutazione contro i Cristiani dello Zaydita al-Qāsim b. Ibrāhīm*, in *Rivista degli Studi Orientali*, 9 (1921-1923), p. 301-364. Prof. Rosalind Gwynne of the

sopher al-Kindī[46], Abū ʿIsā Muḥammad b. Harūn al-Warrāq[47], and a now anonymous pamphlet by a Muslim writer supposed to be of the early Abbasid period[48]. The account of Wāṣil ad-Dimashqī's dispute with the Byzantines is doubly welcome because, as we shall see below, in it one finds a record of certain challenges which ninth-century Christian writers have credited to their Muslim interlocutors, but which the Arabic account of Wāṣil's dispute is the first Islamic text to document as authentic arguments put forward by Muslims. Their presence in the text may help to date its origins to the ninth century.

We may the most conveniently analyze the contents of the dispute text under the rubrics of the several sessions, of which the text records the gist of the arguments: Wāṣil before Bashîr; Wāṣil before Bashîr and a Priest Scholar; Wāṣil before the emperor and a leading church official, who was a priest and a bishop, if not the patriarch of Constantinople.

A. *Wāṣil before Bashîr*

In the session in which Wāṣil was interrogated by Bashîr alone, the subject matter was the Christian doctrine of the incarnation, that is to say, the identification of Jesus of Nazareth as the incarnate son of God. Bashîr introduces the discussion by challenging the *Qur'ān*'s assertion that Adam and Jesus are on a par as creatures created by God (*'Āl 'Imrān*, III:59). At first Wāṣil would not respond to the challenge until his safety was assured, and Bashîr himself agreed that «when I hear the truth I shall yield to it»[49].

As the discussion unfolds, Wāṣil identifies the point at issue as the appropriate description of God (*ṣifat Allāhi*)[50], and while he accepts the fact that Bashîr has given a good description, Wāṣil goes on to own what seems to be practically a Muʿtazilite position, that «God is more grandiose and greater than you can describe, nor can descriptors give a description of Him»[51]. And he maintains that no description of God can apply to the two men Adam and Jesus, both of whom performed the actions of men.

University of Tennessee is preparing an English translation and study of this important text.

[45] See his *Kitāb ar-radd ʿalā an-Naṣārā* in J. Finkel (ed.), *Three Essays of Abu 'Othman 'Amr ibn Bahr al-Jāḥiz*, Cairo, 1926, p. 9-38.

[46] See A. Perier, *Un traité de Yahya b. 'Adi; défense du dogme de la trinité contre les objections d'al-Kindi*, in *Revue de l'Orient Chrétien*, 22 (1920-1921), p. 3-21.

[47] See A. Abel, *Abū 'Isā Muḥammad b. Harūn al-Warrāq; le livre pour la réfutation des trois sectes chrétiennes, texte arabe traduit et présenté*, Bruxelles, 1949.

[48] See D. Sourdel, *Un pamphlet musulman anonyme d'époque 'Abbāside contre les chrétiens*, in *Revue des Études Islamiques*, 34 (1966), p. 1-34. See also Gaudeul, *The Correspondence between Leo and 'Umar* (n. 31 above), in which the author proposes to identify the anonymous Islamic pamphlet with the caliph 'Umar II's (717-720) reported letter to Leo III. Among the newly discovered MSS at Sinai, one reportedly contains an Arabic version of Leo III's letter to 'Umar. See I. E. Meïmarē, *Katalogos tōn neōn arabikōn cheirographōn tēs hieras monēs hagias Aikaterinēs tou orous Sina*, Athens, 1985, p. 41, no. 14 (Greek), p. 43, no. 14 (Arabic).

[49] *Leiden Oriental MS* 951, f. 23ª, l. 5.

Bashîr responds that Wāṣil has failed to distinguish appropriately between Adam and Jesus. He says that Jesus «had two spirits in a single body (*rûḥân ithnatân fî jasadin wâḥidin*)»[52]. This allegation attributed to Bashîr in the text is undoubtedly a Muslim's polemical characterization of the dyophysite Christology any Byzantine or Melkite in Leo III's day would have maintained. Wāṣil proceeds to show its logical untenability as stated, by posing a dilemma, either horn of which would involve an unacceptable conclusion, if one claimed that Jesus truly had two spirits. For if on the one hand the dominant spirit knew and acknowledged the position of the weaker one, it could not then manage to function without it, and its own power would not be independent of it; if on the other hand the dominant spirit did not know the position of the weaker one, how could it then be said to know the secret mysteries, and not know the other spirit with it in a single body?

Having reduced Bashîr to silence on the subject of two spirits in Jesus' single body, Wāṣil turns to the subject of the cross with the following question, «Do you worship (*'abadtum*) the cross as a likeness for Jesus, Mary's son, because he was crucified»[53]? When Bashîr answers in the affirmative, thereby contravening the customary Islamic understanding of the verse in the *Qur'ān* (*an-Nisa'*, IV:157) which seems to deny that Jesus was in fact crucified, Wāṣil poses the further question, «Was it with approval on his part, or resentment»[54]? This question sets up the dilemma which on the one hand concludes that Jesus was crucified by his own *beneplacitum*, with the corollary that no one else could logically be blamed for it; or, on the other hand, that Jesus was powerless to prevent his crucifixion, so how could he logically be worshipped? This exchange finally exasperates Bashîr, and prompts

[50] *Ibid.*, f. 23ª, l. 6.

[51] *Ibid.*, f. 23ª, l. 7-8.

[52] *Ibid.*, f. 23ª, l. 11.

[53] *Ibid.*, f. 23ª, l. 18-19.

[54] *Ibid.*, f. 23ª, l. 19.

him to make arrangements for Wāṣil to debate with «someone at whose hands God will put you to shame»[55].

Wāṣil's posing the dilemma about Jesus' crucifixion, «Was it with approval on his part, or resentment?»[56] is the first record of this argument in an Islamic text of which one knows. Heretofore only Christian apologetic texts have been known to have reported it as a dilemma posed by Muslim controversialists, and all of these Christian texts may be dated to the ninth century[57].

B. *Wāṣil before Bashîr and a Learned Bishop*

In the second session Bashîr introduces Wāṣil to a bishop who is pleased to have a debate partner of the calibre of this Muslim *mutakallim*. The bishop straightaway promises to have Wāṣil baptized by the morrow, a boast which elicits from the Muslim the question, «What is this baptism»[58]? The ensuing dialogue forces the bishop to admit that although he is personally sinful, he and the bishops before him are themselves the ones who sanctified the water of Baptism, by means of which he now means to sanctify Wāṣil. This admission prompts Wāṣil to ask, «Can someone then sanctify the water, who cannot sanctify himself?»[59] — a question which gives the bishop pause. Finally the bishop says that he is not personally the agent of the baptismal water's sanctification, but that the sacrament is a practice (*sunnah*) coming ultimately from the experience of Jesus, and specifically from Jesus' own baptism at the hands of John, Zachary's son. This admission prompts Wāṣil's retort, «Then worship John, for John is in that case better for you than Jesus»[60].

Wāṣil's retort is what amused Bashîr, and prompted him to rebuke the bishop, as quoted above. On this note the second of Wāṣil's debate sessions came to an end. It is noteworthy once again, that in the Christian apologetic texts in Arabic and Syriac from the ninth century, Baptism is unfailingly one of the topics of controversy.

[55] *Ibid.*, f. 23ᵇ, l. 5.
[56] *Ibid.*, f. 23ᵃ, l. 19.
[57] See S. H. Griffith, *Some Unpublished Arabic Sayings Attributed to Theodore Abū Qurrah*, in *Le Muséon*, 92 (1979), p. 29-35; Kh. Samir, *Kitāb ǧāmi' wuǧūh al-imān wa muǧādalah Abī Qurrah 'an ṣalb al-Masīḥ*, in *al-Maçarrat*, 70 (1984), p. 411-427.
[58] *Leiden Oriental MS* 951, f. 23ᵇ, l. 10.
[59] *Ibid.*, f. 23ᵇ, l. 13.
[60] *Ibid.*, f. 23ᵇ, l. 17-18.

C. *Wāṣil before the Emperor and the Patriarch*

According to the story, Wāṣil's notoriety as a successful polemicist comes eventually to the attention of the Byzantine emperor, who accuses the Muslim of belittling Christianity. Wāṣil claims that he had only been engaging in questions and answers in forced circumstances. But Wāṣil admits that he has apologetical arguments and is willing to engage in religious debate with all comers. So the emperor summons a priest whom the text identifies as «the head of the Christians, the one from whom the Christians take their religion»[61]. Presumably the Muslim writer of the text means to designate the patriarch of Constantinople with this titulature. Whether or not this was his intention, the phrase accurately expresses the Islamic position, voiced by other writers, that the religion of the Christians in Islamic times derives not from the Gospel, but from the decisions of emperors, bishops, and ecclesiastical councils[62].

Wāṣil first of all asks the emperor whether or not the priest has a wife and children. The emperor answers angrily that the man is «too pure and too clean to be sullied with menstruation»[63]. This answer allows Wāṣil to point to an inconsistency. On the one hand, the priest is too exalted for this and other human bodily activities, yet on the other hand, Christians are willing to maintain that «the Lord of the Worlds took up residence in the darkness of the bowels and the narrowness of the womb, and sullied himself with menstruation»[64].

«The Lord of the Worlds» is one of the *Qur'ān*'s titles for God, which at least one ninth century Arabophone Christian writer consistently used as an epithet for Jesus the Messiah, in the course of writing an apology for the doctrine of the incarnation[65].

After the priest expresses his disgust at the Muslim for this line of reasoning, Wāṣil goes on to press his argument against the Christian worship of Jesus. If you worship Jesus, he says to the priest, because he had no father, why not worship Adam, to whom the angels were the

[61] *Ibid.*, f. 24ᵃ, l. 4-5.
[62] See S. M. Stern, *'Abd al-Jabbār's Account of How Christ's Religion was falsified by the Adoption of Roman Customs*, in *Journal of Theological Studies*, 19 (1968), p. 128-185. For a study of the Christian response to such allegations, see S. H. Griffith, *Councils in the Church: an Apologetic View from the Christian Orient*, forthcoming.
[63] *Leiden Oriental MS* 951, f. 24ᵃ, l. 6-7.
[64] *Ibid.*, f. 24ᵃ, l. 8-9.
[65] See S. H. Griffith, *The First Christian* Summa Theologiae *in Arabic: Christian* Kalām *in Ninth Century Palestine*, in R. J. Bikhazi & M. Gervers (eds.), *Conversion and Continuity: Indigenous Christian Communities in Islamic Lands, Eighth to Eighteenth Centuries*, Toronto, 1990, p. 15-31.

first ones to bow down in prostration, and you can have two gods. The report that the angels bowed down in prostration to Adam is in the *Qur'ān* (*al-Ḥijr*, XV:28-31). Then Wāṣil says that if you worship Jesus because he raised the dead, why not worship Ezekiel, whom the Bible credits with raising many dead men (*Ezekiel* 37:14)? And in a reference to another *Qur'ān* phrase, Wāṣil says, «Put Ezekiel together with Jesus, so you will have Ezekiel as 'a third of three'»[66]. The *Qur'ān* says, «They have already disbelieved who say that God is the third of three». (*al-Mā'idah*, V:73).

Now that he has introduced the numbering sequence, Wāṣil goes on to argue that if you worship Jesus because of miracles, why not Joshua son of Nun too, who made the sun stand still (*Joshua* 10:12), as «a fourth of four»[67]? And if you worship Jesus because he was carried up to heaven (see *an-Nisā'*, IV:158), there are God's angels ascending up to heaven with every soul, two by day and two by night. To number them would boggle the mind and perplex one's religion.

At this point Wāṣil changes the course of his questioning to ask which in the priest's opinion is the easiest death, the drawn out torment of an ordinary death or to die as the result of a killing. When the priest chooses the latter option, Wāṣil then wants to know why Jesus did not kill his mother rather than leave her to suffer the normal death agony. And he remarks, «If you say he killed her, how does one honor his mother who kills her? If you say he did not kill her, how does one honor his mother who tortures her by the death agony»[68]?

The only other place where the present writer has found a mention of this curious argument as one which a Muslim might employ as a challenge to the Christian doctrine of Jesus' divinity and filial piety is in a ninth century Christian apologetic text in Arabic. In chapter XVIII of the anonymous *Summa Theologiae Arabica*, which contains a long list of Islamic questions and Christian answers, there is a reply to just this challenge[69]. One supposes that the sight of representations of the dormition of the virgin Mary may have prompted Muslim controversialists to pose this dilemma.

Finally the priest has had enough of Wāṣil's questions and has the

[66] *Leiden Oriental MS* 951, f. 24ᵃ, l. 14-15.
[67] *Ibid.*, f. 24ᵃ, l. 17.
[68] *Ibid.*, f. 24ᵇ, l. 1-2.
[69] See *British Museum Oriental MS* 4950, f. 123ᵛ-125ʳ. On chapter XVIII of this *Summa*, which records Christian responses to a number of the challenges Wāṣil voices, see S. H. Griffith, *A Ninth Century* Summa Theologiae Arabica *and the 'Sectarian Milieu'*, in *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam*, to appear.

Muslim removed to a church where only Christians may enter. The emperor soothes Wāṣil's fears by assuring him that the church is merely a place in which one might call God to mind. Accordingly, on entry Wāṣil shouts out the *adhān*, to the consternation of all present, who bring him back to the emperor with the claim that Wāṣil deserves death. To this threat Wāṣil responds that when the news of his death reaches his own sovereign, «he will set his hand to killing priests and bishops, the demolition of churches, breaking crosses, and the removal of the bells»[70]. So the authorities resolve to let Wāṣil go.

There is one final exchange between the emperor and Wāṣil. When the reader remembers that the emperor is Leo III, the instigator of iconoclasm in Byzantium, the topic raised at this juncture is of considerable interest. Wāṣil asks how scripture people (*ahl al-kitāb*), as he now calls the Christians in the *Qur'ān*'s terms (e.g., *al-Baqarah*, II:105), can reproach idolators, when they are guilty of the same thing. Wāṣil says:

> Do you not worship what you have made with your own hands? This is what is in your churches. If it is in the Gospel, there is no argument (*kalām*) to repudiate it. If it is not in the Gospel, why are you making your religion like the religion of the idolators[71]?

To this question the emperor responds: «He speaks the truth. Can you find it in the Gospel»[72]?

When the priest answers in the negative, the text reports the consequences as follows:

> The king said, 'Why do you make my religion like the religion of the idolators'? And he gave orders for the dismantling of the churches, and they set out to dismantle them, weeping[73].

On the priest's orders Wāṣil is returned to the «country of Damascus», as reported above. The text ends with the following notice about Leo III:

> The king set his hand to the killing of priests and bishops and patricians, to the point that they fled into Syria, because they did not find anyone who could give him an argument[74].

[70] *Leiden Oriental MS* 951, f. 24ᵇ, l. 12-13.
[71] *Ibid.*, f. 24ᵇ, l. 15-16.
[72] *Ibid.*, f. 24ᵇ, l. 17.
[73] *Ibid.*, f. 24ᵇ, l. 17-18.
[74] *Ibid.*, f. 24ᵇ, l. 21 - 25ᵃ, l. 1.

III

Bēsēr/Bashîr, Wāṣil ad-Dimashqī, and Iconoclasm in Byzantium

In 1973, on the occasion of the publication of his own views on what he called «a dark age crisis», Peter Brown declared that «the Iconoclast controversy is in the grip of a crisis of over-explanation»[75]. Nevertheless, scholars have persisted over the intervening seventeen years to provide explanations. And there have been recurring attempts to establish a connection between the rise of iconoclasm in Byzantium and the pressure of Islam in the territories of the oriental patriarchates.

Stephen Gero has shown that «Byzantine iconoclasm in the eighth century, as it is described in the sources, was emphatically an imperial heresy, so to speak, born and bred in the purple»[76]. So the partisans of the Islam connection, in reliance on these largely iconophile sources, have focused their attention on the person of Leo III and his Syrian origins in search of the tell-tale Islamic and Arabic influences. In particular, Leo's boon companion Bēsēr/Bashîr has come under suspicion as the «Saracen-minded» *agent provocateur* who seconded and supported the emperor's iconoclastic policies. This assessment of the situation is as old as Theophanes' *Chronography*, as we have seen. The most notable modern proponent of the theory has been Patricia Crone, who straightforwardly concludes that «Leo got the idea from a Byzantine Christian who had converted to Islam in captivity and subsequently escaped. This convert, Bēsēr, i.e. Bishr, is also known in Islamic tradition. ... It is impossible not to recognize in him an Athinganos abroad»[77].

For Crone, the *Athinganoi* were a Jewish-Christian group, «Samaritan Gnostics»[78], as she calls them, «Judeo-Christians who were so eminently well-placed to spark off iconoclasm on *both* sides of the frontier»[79]. On her reading, Bēsēr/Bashîr was the «Phrygian Athinganos» who started «tinkering with the highly charged wires» of «an inveterate hostility to Christian pictures» on the part of the Arabs, and «an endemic bad conscience about such pictures» among the Greeks. The result, according to Crone, was «a short anti-Christian blast among the Arabs, and an enormous explosion burning up the accumulated qualms of the Greeks»[80].

[75] P. Brown, *A Dark-Age Crisis: Aspects of the Iconoclastic Controversy*, in *The English Historical Review*, 88 (1973), p. 3.
[76] Gero, *Byzantine Iconoclasm*, p. 168.
[77] Crone, *Islam*, p. 77-78.
[78] *Ibid.*, p. 79.
[79] *Ibid.*, p. 76.
[80] *Ibid.*, p. 80.

There is no documentary evidence for the notion that Bēsēr/Bashîr was an *Athinganos*, or that the *Athinganoi* were a discoverable group of Arabophone Judeo-Christians in Umayyad times in the territories of the caliphate. But here is not the place to pursue these issues. Suffice it to say that neither does the Islamic Arabic text in *Leiden Oriental MS* 951 support the view that Bēsēr/Bashîr was the person who inspired the emperor Leo III to adopt an iconoclastic policy in Byzantium. Rather, according to the Islamic recension of his story, Bēsēr/Bashîr was the friendly character through whom the Muslim *mutakallim*, Wāṣil ad-Dimashqī gained an introduction to Leo III.

According to the author of the Arabic dispute text, Wāṣil accuses the Christians, in the person of Leo III, of «making your religion like the religion of the idolators»[81]. And when no one in the emperor's entourage can provide him with a Gospel justification for «what is in your churches», as Wāṣil calls the icons which he never names as such, the text says Leo III «gave orders for the dismantling of the churches»[82]. Thereafter, the text says, the emperor instituted what historians have come to call the Iconoclast persecution in Byzantium. There is even at the end of the text the otherwise unattested but not implausible allegation that as a result of the persecution, «priests, bishops and patriarchs ... fled into Syria»[83] for safety.

The text in *Leiden Oriental MS* 951 furnishes the historian with documentary evidence of the fact that for polemico/apologetical purposes Muslim controversialists claimed that Islamic religious challenges were at least partially responsible for the imperial policy of iconoclasm in Byzantium. The fact that Muslim controversialists made this claim, here documented, does not prove a factual connection between Islam and Byzantine iconoclasm.

In the opinion of the present writer, it is a well documented fact that the emperor Leo III personally instigated the first governmental policy of iconoclasm in Byzantium on the advice of his advisors, both ecclesiastical and lay. It even seems likely that the pressure of Islam in

[81] *Leiden Oriental MS* 951, f. 24b, l. 16.
[82] *Ibid.*, f. 24b, l. 18.
[83] *Ibid.*, f. 25a, l. 1. Prof. Stephen Gero of the University of Tübingen has called my attention to a passage in the pre-787 iconophile document, the so-called *Nouthesia*, according to which a man named Theosebēs, the author of a portion of the document, says in the colophon that having written an account of the iconophile George's defense of the icons in debate, and of his imprisonment, he, Theosebēs, having himself been released from prison, has fled to Syria for safety. Theosebēs presumably wrote early in the reign of Constantine V (741-775). See the account of the document in S. Gero, *Byzantine Iconoclasm during the Reign of Constantine V; with particular attention to the oriental sources* (*CSCO*, 384), Louvain, 1977, p. 25-36; esp. p. 27, n. 13.

the oriental patriarchates was one of the conditional factors that fostered anti-iconic thinking on the part of some Byzantine intellectuals and churchmen. However, the influencing factor was not Islamic anti-iconic religious attitudes as such, nor even the often cited anti-Christian legislation of the Caliph Yazīd II[84]. Rather, it seems more likely that in response to arguments about religion with Muslims and Jews in the territories of the caliphate, some Christians in the oriental patriarchates themselves adopted an attitude of iconophobia which put them at odds with their own fellow Christians, who then accused them of adopting it out of a fear of the reproach of Muslims and Jews. Theodore Abū Qurrah, the student of St. John of Damascus, explicitly made this claim in his Arabic tract in defense of the Christian practice of venerating icons, which he wrote between the years 800 and 812[85]. Therefore, the influencing factor from the Islamic world which may have affected the thinking of Leo III and his advisors was more likely to have been the iconophobic thinking of the oriental Christians of the ilk of those against whom Abū Qurrah wrote, than anything specifically Islamic. There is ample evidence for the existence of this iconophobia in main-line Christian groups in the oriental patriarchates. And there is a good body of evidence for the immigration of Christians from the east into Byzantium in the eighth and ninth centuries. To put it all together to suggest that iconophobia among Christians who lived in or who came from the Islamic world was a factor which influenced Leo III and his advisors is beyond the scope of the present endeavor.

In conclusion, one may say that the text in *Leiden Oriental MS* 951 proves that from the Islamic point of view, iconoclasm in Byzantium was an issue that readily played into the hands of Muslim religious controversialists, at the very time that Christian apologists were defending icon veneration in Syriac and Arabic texts. As for Bēsḗr/Bashîr, he remains Leo III's boon companion, with no role at all to play in the instigation of iconoclasm, beyond what Theophanes had claimed: «he was a comrade in this great evil the Emperor worked»[86].

[84] The arguments of King, *Islam, Iconoclasm* (see n. 3 above), seem convincing to the present writer.

[85] See S. H. Griffith, *Theodore Abū Qurrah's Arabic Tract on the Christian Practice of Venerating Images*, in *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 105 (1985), p. 53-73.

[86] See n. 4 above.

APPENDIX:

LEIDEN ORIENTAL MS 951 (2) ARABIC TEXT AND ENGLISH TRANSLATION

by

Sidney H. Griffith and Larry B. Miller

Leiden Oriental *MS* 951 (2)

(22b) قال : اخبرنا الشيخ ابو الحسين علي بن محمّد بن محمّد عبد الله بن بشران السكري قال : اخبرنا ابو عمرو عثمان بن احمد بن عبد الله بن السمّاك. حدثنا عبيد بن محمّد بن خلف البزّار. حدثنا الحسن ابن الصباح البزّار. حدثنا محمّد بن كثير المصيصي الصنعاني عن محمّد بن الحسين عن واصل.

قال : اسر غلام من بني بطارقة الروم وكان غلامًا جميلًا فلما صاروا الى دار السلام وقع الى الخليفة [1] وذلك في ولاية بني امية فسماه بشيرًا. وامر به الى الكتّاب فكتب وقرأ القرآن وروي الشعر وقاس وطلب احاديث وحج. فلما بلغ واجتمع اتاه الشيطان فوسوس اليه وذكره النصرانية دين ابائه. فهرب مرتدًّا من دار الاسلام الى ارض الروم للذي سبق له في ام الكتاب. فاتي به ملك الطاغية فسأله عن حاله وما كان فيه وما الذي دعاه الى الدخول في النصرانية. فاخبره برغبته فيه فعظم في عين الملك فروّسه وصيّره بطريقًا من بطارقته واقطعه قرى كثيرة وهي اليوم تعرف به يقال لها قرى بشير.

وكان من قضاء الله وقدره انه اسر ثلاقون رجلا من المسلمين فلما دخلوا على بشير سايلهم رجلًا رجلًا عن دينهم. وكان فيهم شيخ من اهل دمشق يقال لهِ واصل. فسايله بشير فابا الشيخ ان يرد عليه شيء ما.

فقال بشير: ما لك لا تجيبُني.

قال : الشيخ لست اجيبك اليوم بشيء.

قال بشير للشيخ : اني سايلك غداً فاعدّ جواباً وامره بالانصراف.

[1] في الهامش : وهو عبد الملك ابن مراون.

* f. 22b, l. 2 The Shaykh Abū l-Ḥusayn ʿAlī ibn Muḥammad ʿAbd Allāh ibn Bishr gave us the report that as-Sukkarî said Abū ʿUthmān ibn Aḥmad ibn ʿAbd Allāh ibn as-Sammāk informed us, ʿUbayd ibn Muḥammad ibn Ḥalaf al-Bazzār had given us the story, al-Ḥasan ibn as-Ṣabāḥ al-Bazzār gave us the story, Muḥammad ibn Kathīr al-Mûṣayṣî aṣ-Ṣanaʿânî gave us the story on the authority of Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥusayn, on the authority of Wāṣil. He said:

There was a youth captured from the patricians of the Rūm, who was a handsome youth. When they came to the 'Abode of Peace' he was allocated to the caliph[1]. This was during the rule of the Umayyads. He gave him the name Bashîr and remanded him to the care of the scribes. He learned to write, he recited the *Qur'ān*, he declaimed poetry, he compared and went in search of traditions, and he went on pilgrimage. When he came of age and matured, Satan approached him. He whispered to him and made him recall Christianity, the religion of his fathers. So he fled an apostate from the abode of Islam into the territory of the Rūm, to the one to whom he had previously belonged according to the Mother of the Book (*i.e.*, originally). He brought him to the tyrant king. He asked him about his situation, what he was about, and what had prompted him to enter into Christianity. So he told him about his desire for it. And he gained stature in the eye of the king, so he gave him a title and he made him one of his patricians and granted him many villages. Even until today they are known in reference to him, being called the villages of Bashîr.

It happened by God's power and decree that 30 Muslim men were captured. When they came into Bashîr's presence, he questioned them man by man about their religion. There was among them a Shaykh from Damascus, who was called Wāṣil. Bashîr questioned him, but the Shaykh refused to reply to him at all.

Bashîr said to him, «What is the matter with you; will you not answer me»?

The Shaykh said, «I am not going to answer you about anything today».

Bashîr said to the Shaykh, «I will question you tomorrow, so be ready to answer». And he ordered him to leave.

[1] In the margin: «It was ʿAbd al-Malik ibn Marwān».

فلما كان من الغد بعث بشير فادخل الشيخ اليه. فقال بشير: الحمد لله الذي كان قبل ان يكون شيء وخلق سبع سمواتٍ طباقًا بلا عون كان معه من خلقه فعجبًا لكم معاشِر العرب حين تقولون ان مثل عيسى عند الله كمثل آدم من خلقه من تراب. ثم قال له كن فيكون. فسكت الشيخ.

فقال له بشير: ما لك لا تجيبني؟

فقال كيف اجيبك وانا اسير في يدك فان اجبتك بما تهوي اسخطت عليّ ربي وهلكت في ديني. وان اجبتك بما لا (23a) تهوى خفت على نفسي فاعطني عهد الله وميثاقه وما اخذ النبيون على الامم انك لا تغدِر بي ولا تمحِل بي ولا تبغ بي باغيةً سوء وانك اذا سمعت الحق تنقاد له.

فقال بشير: ذلك على عهد الله وميثاقه وما اخذ الله عزّ وجلّ على النبيين وما اخذ (على) النبيون على الامم اني لا اغدِر بك ولا امحل بك ولا ابغى بك باغية سوء واني اذا سمعت الحق انقدت اليه.

قال الشيخ: امّا ما وصفت من صفة الله عزّ وجلّ فقد احسنت الصفة، واما ما لم يبلغ علمك ولم يستحكم عليه رايك اكثر والله اعظم واكبر مما وصفت. فلا يصف الواصفون صفة واما ما ذكرت من هذين الرجلين فقد اسات الصفة. الم يكونا ياكلان الطعام ويشربان ويبولان ويتغوطان وينامان ويستيقظان ويفرحان ويحزنان؟

قال بشير: بلى.

قال: فلمَ فرقتم بينهما؟

قال بشير: لان عيسى بن مريم عليهما السلام كان له روحان اثنتان في جسدٍ واحد، روح يعلم بها الغيوب وما في قعر البحار وما ينحاث من ورق الاشجار، وروح يبري بها الاكمه والابرص ويحيي بها الموتى.

قال الشيخ: روحانِ اثنتان في جسَد واحد؟

قال بشير: نعم.

قال الشيخ: فهل كانت القوية تعرف موضع الضعيفة بهما ام لا؟

When the morrow came, Bashîr sent and brought the Shaykh to him. Bashîr said, «Praise be to God, who was before anything could come to be. He created the seven heavens in levels, there being no helper from creation with him — a marvel to you, O Arabs, when you say, 'Jesus is with God as is Adam; He created him from dust, then he said to him, 'Be', and he would come to be'». (*Al 'Imrān* III:59) The Shaykh fell silent. Bashîr said to him, «What is the matter with you; will you not answer me»?

He said, «How can I answer you? I am a prisoner in your power. If I answer you the way you want, I will have made my Lord angry at me and I will have perished in my religion. If I answer you not the way * you want, I am afraid for my life. So grant me God's vow and promise, and what the prophets exacted from the peoples, that you will not doublecross me, nor will you scheme against me, nor will you act unjustly against me out of a desire for iniquity, and that when you hear the truth you will yield to it».

* f. 23a

Bashîr said, «You have over me God's vow and promise, what God, mighty and exalted is He, enjoined on the prophets and what the prophets enjoined on the peoples. I will not doublecross you, nor will I scheme against you, nor will I act unjustly against you out of a desire for iniquity. And when I hear the truth I shall yield to it».

The Shaykh said, «In regard to the description you give of God, mighty and exalted is He, you have given a right description. As for what your knowledge does not attain, and that about which your opinion is not solid, it is the larger part. God is more grandiose and greater than you can describe, nor can any descriptors give a description of Him. In regard to what you mentioned of these two men, you have given a wrong description. Did they not both eat food and drink, urinate and defecate, go to sleep and awaken, experience happiness and sadness»?

Bashîr said, «Yes indeed».

He said, «Why do you distinguish them»?

Bashîr said, «Jesus, Mary's son, peace be on them, had two spirits in a single body: a spirit by which he might know hidden things, what is on the bottom of the seas, and what is to be extracted from the leaves of trees; and a spirit by which he might cure the blind and the leprous and by which he might revive the dead».

The Shaykh said, «Two spirits in a single body»?

Bashîr said, «Yes».

The Shaykh said, «Does the dominant one acknowledge the position of the weaker one of them or not»?

قال بشير: قاتلك الله ماذا تريد ان تقول ان قلت انها لا تعلم وماذا تريد ان قلت انها تعلم؟

قال الشيخ: إن قلتَ انها تعلم قلتُ فما يغني عنها قوتها حين لا تطرد هذه الافات عنها؟ وإن قلتَ انها لا تعلم قلتُ فكيف تعلم الغيوب ولا تعلم موضع روح معها في جَسَد واحد؟

فسكت بشير.

قال الشيخ: اسألك بنى. هل عبدتم الصليب مثلا لعيسي بن مريم انه صُلِب؟

قال بشير: نعم.

قال الشيخ: فبرضاء كان منه ام بسخط؟

قال بشير: هذه اخت تلك ماذا تريد ان تقول؟! ان قلت برضى منه قلتَ ما نعمتم اعطوا ما سالوا وارادوا وان قلت بسخطٍ قلتَ فَلم تعبدون ما لا يمنع نفسه؟

ثم قال (23b) الشيخ لبشير: نشدتك بالله هل كان عيسى ياكل الطعام ويشرب ويصوم ويصلي ويبول ويتغوط وينام ويستيقظ ويفرح ويحزن؟

قال: نعم.

قال الشيخ: نشدتك بالله، لمن كان يصوم ويصلي؟

قال: لله عز وجلّ.

ثم قال بشير: والضار النافع ما ينبغي لمثلك ان يعيش في النصرانية، اراك رجلا قد تعلمت الكلام وانا رجل صاحب سيف ولكن غدا اتيك بمن يخزيك بالله علي يديه. ثم امره بالانصراف.

فلما كان من غد بعث بشير الى الشيخ فلما دخل عليه اذا عنده قس عظيم اللحية.

قال له بشير: ان هذا رجل من العرب له علم وعقل واصل في العرب وقد احب الدخول في ديننا فكلمه حتى تنصّره.

Bashîr said, «May God fight you, what would you want to say, if I said, 'It does not know', and what would you want if I said, 'It does know'»?

The Shaykh said, «If you say it does know, I say, how could its own power be independent of it, since it could not dispel these disabilities without it? And if you say it does not know, I say, how could it know the secret things, and not know the position of a spirit with it in a single body»?

Bashîr fell silent.

The Shaykh said, «I am going to ask you a question, my son. Do you worship the cross as a likeness for Jesus, Mary's son, because he was crucified»?

Bashîr said, «Yes».

The Shaykh said, «Was it with approval on his part, or resentment»?

Bashîr said, «This point is the same as the previous one. What do you want to say? If I say with approval on his part, you say, 'How blessed you are! They got what they asked for and wanted'. If I say with resentment, you say, 'Why do you worship what he himself could not stop»?

* f. 23b Then the Shaykh said * to Bashîr, «I implore you in God, did Jesus used to eat food, drink, fast, pray, urinate, defecate, go to sleep, wake up, be happy, and be sad»?

He said, «Yes».

The Shaykh said, «I implore you in God, to whom did he used to fast and pray»?

He said, «To God, mighty and exalted is He».

Then Bashîr said, «Salutary punishment is what would behoove the likes of you if you were living in Christendom. I see you are a man who has learned dialectic (*al-kalām*). I am a man who is master of the sword. But tomorrow I will bring you someone at whose hands God will put you to shame». Then he gave orders to leave. When the morrow came Bashîr sent for the Shaykh. When he came into his presence, there was with him a priest with a mighty beard.

Bashîr said to him, «Here is a man of the Arabs who has knowledge, intelligence, and lineage among the Arabs. He wants to enter into our religion, so engage in dialectic with him (*kallimhu*) until you convert him». The priest made a bow to Bashîr and said, «Of old you have brought me the best; this one is even better than any you have brought me». Then the priest approached the Shaykh and said, «O Shaykh, what have you brought onto the great man? His mind has departed and his forbearance has left him. Tomorrow I am going to immerse you in

فسجد القس لبشير وقال : قديماً اتيت اليَّ الخير وهذا افضل مما اتيت اليَّ. ثم اقبل القس على الشيخ فقال : ايها الشيخ ما انت بالكبير الذي قد ذهب عقله وتفرق عنه حلمه غدا اغطسك في المعمودية غطسة تخرج منها اليوم ولدتك امك.

قال الشيخ : ما هذه المعمودية؟

قال القس : ماء مقدس.

قال الشيخ : من قدسه؟

قال القس : قدسته انا والاساقفة قبلي.

قال الشيخ : فهل كان لكم ذنوب وخطايا؟

قال القس : نعم، غير انها كثيرة.

قال الشيخ : فهل يقدس الماء من لا يقدس نفسه؟

قال : فسكت القس. ثم قال : اني لم اقدسه انا.

قال الشيخ : فكيف كانت القصة إذَن؟

قال القس : انما كانت سنة من عيسى ابن مريم.

قال الشيخ : فكين كان الامر؟

قال القس : ان يحيي بن زكريا اغطس عيسى ابن مريم عليهم السلام بالاردُن غطسه ومسَح برأسه ودعا له بالبركة.

قال الشيخ : فاحتاج عيسي الى يحيي يمسح رأسه ويدعوا له بالبركة فاعبدوا يحيي فيحيي خير لكم من عيسى اذن.

فسكت القس.

فاستلق بشير على فراشه وادخل كمّه في فيه وجعل يضحك.

قال للقس : قم خزاك الله ! دعوتك لتنصّره فاذا انت قد اسلمت !

قال : ثم ان امر الشيخ بلغ الملك فبعث اليه فقال : ما هذا الذي قد بلغني عنك وعن تنقصك ديننا ووقيعتك؟

قال الشيخ : ان لي ديناً كنتُ سُإلتُ عنه فلما قَصَصتُ عنه (24a) سالت عنه فلما لم امدّ يدًا للذبّ عنه؟

قال الملك فهل في يدك حجج؟

قال الشيخ : نعم. ادّع اليّ من شئت يحاججني فان كان الحق في يدي فلِمَ تلومني عن الذب عن الحق؟ وان كان الحق في يديك رجعت الى الحق. فدعى الملك العظيم النصرانية ولما دخل عليه سجد له الملك ومن عنده اجمعون.

baptism, an immersion from which you will emerge as on the day your mother bore you».

The Shaykh said, «What is this Baptism»?

The Priest said, «Holy water».

The Shaykh said, «Who made it holy»?

The Priest said, «I made it holy, and the bishops before me».

The Shaykh said, «Do you have offenses and sins»?

The Priest said, «Yes, without them being many».

The Shaykh said, «Can someone then make the water holy, who cannot make himself holy»? He spoke, and the priest fell silent. Then he said, «I do not myself make it holy».

The Shaykh said, «How then has the tale come about»?

The Priest said, «It is but a practice (*sunnah*) from Jesus, Mary's son».

The Shaykh said, «How did the affair happen»?

The Priest said, «John, Zachary's son, immersed Jesus, Mary's son, on whom be peace, in the Jordan; he immersed him, he anointed his head, and he called down a blessing on him».

The Shaykh said, «So Jesus needed John to anoint his head and to call down a blessing on him. Then worship John, for John is in that case better for you than Jesus».

The Priest fell silent.

Bashîr fell back on his cushion and he put his sleeve into his mouth and he began to laugh. He said to the Priest, «Stand up, God shame you, I summoned you to convert him to Christianity, and now you have become a Muslim»!

Thereafter, the business of the Shaykh came to the King's attention, and he sent for him. He said, «What is this that has come to my attention about you, about your belittlement of our religion, and your quarreling»?

The Shaykh said, «I have a religion, about which I was questioned.
* f. 24a When I gave an account of it *, I asked him about his. Why should I not have extended a hand for the defense of it»?

The King said, «Do you have arguments to hand»?

The Shaykh said, «Yes. I invite anyone you want to argue with me. If the truth is with me, why do you reproach me for defending the truth? If the truth is with you, I will return to the truth».

The King summoned the most important man as far as the Christians are concerned. When he entered his presence, the King made a prostration to him, as did all of those who were with him.

قال الشيخ : ايها الملك من هذا؟

قال الملك : هذا رأس النصرانية هذا الذي تأخذ النصرانية دينها عنه.

قال الشيخ : فهل له من ولد ام هل له من إمرأة ام هل له من عَقِب؟

قال الملك : ما لك خزاك الله هذا ازكى واطهر ان يدنس بالحيض. هذا ازكى واطهر من ذلك.

قال الشيخ : فانتم تكرهُون لادمى يكون منه ما يكون من بني آدم من الغايط والبول والنوم والسهر ويأخذكم من ذكر الفساد تزعمون ان ربّ العالمين سكن في ظلمة الاحشاء وضيق الرحم ودنس بالحيض؟

قال القس : هذا شيطان من شياطين العرب رما به البحر اليكم فاخرجوه من حيث جاء.

فاقبل الشيخ على القس فقال : عبدتم عيسى بن مريم انه لا اب له. فهذا آدم لا اب له ولا ام. خلقه الله عزّوجلّ بيده واسجد له ملايكته، فضُمُوا آدم مع عيسى حتي يكون لك الاهان اثنان. فان كنتم انما عبدتموه لانه احيي الموتي، فهذا حزقيل تجدونه مكتوباً عندكم في التوراة ولانجيل لا ننكره نحن ولا انتم من بميت فدعى الله عزّوجلّ له فاحياه حتى كلمه فضمّوا حزقيل مع عيسى حتى يكون لكم حزقيل ثالث ثلاث. وان كنتم انما عبدتموه لانه اراكم العجب فهذا يوشعٍ بن نون قاتل قومه حتى غرب الشمس قال لها إرجعي بإذن الله فرجعت اثنى عشر برجاً فضموا يوشع بن نون مع عيسى يكون لكم رابع اربعة. وان كنتم انما عبدتموه لانه عرج به الى السماء فمن ملايكة الله عزّوجلّ مع كل نفس اثنان بالليل واثنان بالنهار يعرجون الى السماء ما لو ذهبنا نعدهم لالتبس علينا عقولنا واختلط علينا ديننا وما ازددنا في ديننا الا تحيراً.

ثم قال : ايها القس، اخبرني عن رجل حلّ به الموت أيكون اهون عليه او القتل؟

قال القس : القتل.

The Shaykh said, «O King, who is this man»?

The King said, «This is the Head of the Christians; this is the one from whom the Christians take their religion».

The Shaykh said, «Does he have any offspring, or does he have a woman, or does he have any progeny»?

The King said, «What is the matter with you, God shame you? This man is too pure and too clean to be sullied with menstruation; he is too pure and clean for that».

The Shaykh said, «So you are unwilling, in regard to a human being, for there to affect him what affects the sons of Adam: defecation, urination, going to sleep, awakening. But without any mention of corruption, you are moved to maintain that the Lord of the Worlds took up residence in the darkness of the bowels and the narrowness of the womb, and sullied himself with menstruation».

The Priest said, «This man is the most satanic Arab the Sea has thrown up to you. Take him back to wherever he has come from».

The Shaykh approached the Priest and he said, «You worship Jesus, Mary's son, in that he had no father. What about Adam, who had neither father nor mother? God, mighty and exalted is He, created him with His own hand and required His angels to make a prostration to him. Therefore, put Adam together with Jesus, so you will have two gods. And if you worship him only because he revivified the dead, what about Ezekiel? You will find him inscribed for you in the Torah and the Gospel. Neither we nor you will disclaim him. Whoever was dead, he called on God, mighty and exalted is He, and He revivified him, so that he conversed with him. (cf. *Ezek*. 37:1-14). Therefore, put Ezekiel together with Jesus, so you will have Ezekiel as 'a third of three'. (cf. *al-Mā'idah* V:73) And if you worship him only because he showed you miracles, what about Joshua, the son of Nun, whose people were fighting at sundown? He said to it [i.e., the sun], 'By God's permission, fall back'. It fell back twelve zodiacal signs. (cf. *Josh*. 10:12) Therefore, put Joshua, the son of Nun, together with Jesus, to have for yourselves a fourth of four! If you worship him only because he was carried up to heaven, of God's angels, mighty and exalted is He, there are two by night and two by day, with every soul, ascending up to heaven. Were we to proceed to count them, our minds would soon be boggled, and our religion would be mixed up for us, and we would not be increased in our religion, but in perplexity».

Then he said, «O Priest, tell me about a man on whom death has alighted, is it easier for him or is killing»?

The Priest said, «Killing».

قال : فلِمَ لم يقتل عيسى امه (24b) عذبها بنزع النفس؟ ان قلت انه قتلها، فما برَّ أمّه من قتلها؟ وان قلتَ انه لم يقتلها فما برَّ امه من عذبها بنزع النفس؟

قال القس : اذهبُوا به الي الكنيسة العظمي فإنه لا يدخلها احد الا تنصّر.

قال الملك : اذهبوا به.

قال الشيخ : لماذا يذهب بي ولا حجة عليّ دُحضت؟

قال الملك : لن يضرك، انما هو بيت من بيُوت ربك عزّوجلّ تذكر الله عزّوجلّ فيه.

قال الشيخ : ان كان هكذا فلا بأس.

قال : فذهبوا به فلما دخل الكنيسة وضع اصبعيه في اذنيه ورفع صوته للاذان فجزعوا لذلك جزعاً شديداً وضربوه وَلَبَّبُوه وجاوًا به الى الملك فقالوا : ايها الملك أحل بنفسه القتل.

فقال له الملك : لم احلك بنفسك القتل؟

فقال : ايها الملك، اين ذهب بي؟

قال : ذهبوا بك الى بيت من بيوت الله عزّ وجلّ لتذكر فيه ربك عزّ وجلّ.

قال : فقد دخلت وذكرت ربي بلساني وعظمته بقلبي. وإن كان كل ما ذكر الله في كتابكم يصغر دينكم فزادكم الله صغاراً.

قال الملك : صدق، ولا سبيل لكم عليه.

قالوا : ايها الملك، لا نرضي حتى نقتله.

قال الشيخ : إنكم متى قتلتموني فبلغ ذلك ملكنا، وضع يده في قتل القسيسين والاساقفة وخرب الكنايس وكسر الصُلبان ومنع النواقيس.

قال : فانه يفعل؟

قال : نعم فلا تشكوا.

ففكرُوا في ذلك، فتركوُه.

قال الشيخ : ايها الملك، ما عاب اهل الكتاب علي اهل الاوثان؟

* f. 24b He said, «So why did Jesus not kill his mother? * He tortured her by the death agony. If you say he killed her, how does one honor his mother who kills her? If you say he did not kill her, how does one honor his mother who tortures her by the death agony»?

The Priest said, «Take him away to the paramount church; no one may enter it unless he becomes a Christian».

The King said, «Take him away».

The Shaykh said, «Why would he take me away, without any argument being refuted against me»?

The King said, «He will not hurt you. It is only one of the houses of your Lord, mighty and exalted is He, in which you may call God to mind, mighty and exalted is He».

The Shaykh said, «If that is so, there is no harm [in it]».

He said they then took him away. When he entered the church, he put his fingers into his ears and he raised his voice for the call to prayer (*al-'adhān*). At that they became mightily impatient and they beat him and they grabbed him, and they brought him to the king.

They said, «O King, he has personally allowed killing».

The King said to him, «Why did you personally allow killing for yourself»?

He said, «O King, where did they take me away»?

He said, «They took you away to one of the houses of God, mighty and exalted is He, in which to call your Lord to mind, mighty and exalted is He».

He said, «I entered and with my own tongue I called to mind my Lord, and I magnified Him in my heart. If, whenever God is called to mind in your churches, your religion is held in contempt, may God load you with contempt».

The King said, «He speaks the truth; you have no entree against him».

They said, «O King, we will not be satisfied until we kill him».

The Shaykh said, «When you kill me and [news of] it reaches our king, he will set his hand to killing priests and bishops, the demolition of churches, breaking crosses, and the removal of bells».

He said, «Will he do it»?

He said, «Yes, so have no doubt [about it]».

They thought about it and they let him go.

The Shaykh said, «O King, how can the Scripture people reproach the people of the idols»?

قال : بما عبدوُا ما عملوا بايديهم.

قال : فهل انتم تعبدون ما عملتم بايديكم هذا الذي في كنايسكم؟ فان كان في الانجيل فلا كلام لنا فيه، وان لم يكن في الانجيل فلم تشبه دينك بدين اهل الاوثان؟

قال الملك : صدق. هل تجدون في الانجيل؟

قال القس : لا.

قال الملك : فلم تشبه ديني بدين اهل الاوثان فامر بنقض الكنايس فجعلوا ينقضونها ويبكون.

قال القس : إن هذا لشيطان من شياطين العرب رما به البحر اليكم فاخرجوه من حيث جاء فلا يقطر من دمه قطرة في بلادكم، فيفسد عليكم دينكم فوكلوا به رجالا فاخرجوُه الى بلاد دمشق ووضع الملك يده في قتل القسيسين والاساقفة والبطارقة (25a) حتى هربوا الى الشام لانهم لم يجدوا احداً يحاجه.

تم الحديث بحمد الله وعونه وصلى الله على سيدنا محمّد وآله وصحبه وسلم.

He said, «Because they worship (*'abadu'*) what they have made with their own hands».

He said, «Do you not worship what you have made with your hands? This is what is in your churches. If it is in the Gospel, there is no argument (*kalām*) to repudiate it. If it is not in the Gospel, why are you making your religion like the religion of the people of the idols»?

The King said, «He speaks the truth. Can you find [it] in the Gospel»?

The Priest said, «No».

The King said, «Why do you make my religion like the religion of the people of the idols»? And he gave orders for the destruction of the churches, and they began to destroy them, and they were weeping.

The Priest said, «This Satan is one of the Arab Satans the Sea has thrown up to you. Take him away to wherever he has come from. Let not a drop of his blood drip onto your country, so as to degrade your religion for you».

So they put him into the charge of some men and they removed him to the country of Damascus. And the King set his hand to the killing of
* f. 25a priests and bishops and patricians * to the point that they fled into Syria, because they did not find anyone who could give him an argument.

The end of the story (*al-ḥadīth*). Praise be to God. May God's help and blessing be on our master Muḥammad and his family, and on his companions peace.

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